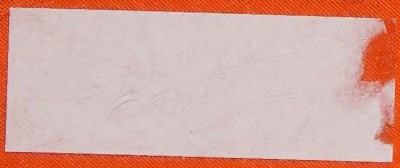
THE MOUNTAIN

ST. JOHN G. ERVINE



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THE MOUNTAIN
AND OTHER STORIES

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

NOVELS

MRS. MARTIN'S MAN
ALICE AND A FAMILY
CHANGING WINDS
THE FOOLISH LOVERS
THE WAYWARD MAN

PLAYS

JANE CLEGG
JOHN FERGUSON
THE SHIP
THE CHARWOMAN'S DAUGHTER
THE LADY OF BELMONT
ANTHONY AND ANNA
FOUR ONE-ACT PLAYS
The Magnanimous Lover
Progress
Ole George Comes to Tea
She Was No Lady

PERSONAL ESSAYS

SOME IMPRESSIONS OF MY ELDERS

THEATRE CRAFT

THE ORGANISED THEATRE

THE MOUNTAIN

AND OTHER STORIES

By

ST. JOHN G. ERVINE

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1928

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TO

LENNOX ROBINSON

Some of these stories and sketches were published in a small book, entitled "Eight O'Clock and Other Studies," which has long been out of print.

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THE MOUNTAIN
AND OTHER STORIES

THE MOUNTAIN

THE MOUNTAIN

He was one of those insignificant-looking men who somehow catch your attention and hold it. I first saw him on the pier at Dover, in a flutter of excitement at the sight of two Channel steamers when he had expected to see only one. There was a great crowd of travellers, some of them going to Ostend and some to Calais, and in the confusion the little man seemed likely to be left behind. He flourished his book of coupons in the face of an official and mumbled something about Switzerland, but his air was so vague and his gesture so impotent that the official, a stoutish man suffering from insufficient exercise and an excess of appetite, completely ignored him. He looked about in a helpless fashion, and then made a step towards the Ostend boat, but, still uncertain, retraced it and made a step towards the Calais boat.

"Can I help you?" I said to him.

The look of gratitude which came into his eyes and made them very attractive was sufficient reward for my offer. "Oh, thank you, sir!" he said. "It's the boat for Switzerland I want."

I took hold of his book of coupons.

"You see," he continued, "I'm not used to this sort

of thing. I've never been farther than Folkestone before, and, of course, it's very confusing!"

"This is your boat," I said, pointing to the steamer for Calais. "I'm going to Switzerland myself."

"Oh, I *am* glad," he interrupted. But whether his pleasure was on my account or his own I could not make out.

He followed me on to the boat, and, with difficulty, we found seats, on which we dumped our luggage. The deck was crowded with a variety of races, principally American, English, and French, and I could see that the little man was enthralled by the scene. "Very interesting, isn't it?" he said. "Foreigners are *very* amusing, I always think."

"You'll be a foreigner in about an hour," I replied.

He looked at me in a puzzled way. "'Ow d'you mean?" he said.

"Well, you'll be in France, and an Englishman's a foreigner in France."

"Yes—yes, I suppose he is," he murmured after a moment's reflection. "I didn't think of that. I daresay we're just as funny to foreigners as they are to us!"

"No doubt," said I.

The business of transferring passengers and luggage from the train to the steamer was completed, and then, after some shrieks from the siren, we moved out of Dover Harbour and started off across the Channel to France. The congestion on the deck was so great that movement was not easy, and I sat still in my seat, and the little man, who, I began to suspect, had now attached himself to me, remained by my side. He did

not speak much at first, but sat watching the cliffs, and I wondered what were his thoughts. "That one," I said, "is Shakespeare's Cliff. Mentioned in *King Lear.*"

"Oh, yes," he murmured, without interest; and then, "I was thinking they looked like waves—solid waves!"

"Perhaps they are," I answered, and I started off on a baseless theory that in some remote period of time a great stretch of crumpled sea had been frozen or solidified into the cliffs of Dover. But I had not got very far when a ship's officer came round to see our tickets, and in the business of satisfying him and securing landing tickets, my theory went overboard. The passage was a fine one, unlikely to upset the queasiest nature, and the Channel was a lovely colour. The word "jade" has, I know, been worn out in descriptions, but no other word adequately describes the colour of the sea on that day. Pale jade! And when a large ship, fully rigged, came towards us, with her white jibs and royals and mizzens all shining in the sun, I thought I had never seen anything so beautiful. I turned to my companion, who was entranced by that white ship on a green sea.

"Beautiful, isn't it?" I said.

He turned to me, without speaking, and I saw that his eyes were full of tears. I felt embarrassed and looked away, but my interest in him was stimulated, and the irritation I had at the thought that he was attaching himself to me went. I resolved to see him through the troubles of landing at Calais.

"Can you speak French?" I said to him.

"Oh, no!" he answered, smiling apologetically.

He thanked me profusely when I volunteered to see him safely into the train. "I've never been out of England before," he said, "and of course I'm not used to it. Thank you very much, sir!"

He told me he was going to Mürren and, not altogether gratified, I told him that I was going there, too.

"Oh, I *am* glad," he said. "You see, I *don't* know my way about, and I keep on thinking perhaps I'll get lost. If you wouldn't mind just keeping an eye on me and seeing I don't get lost, I'd be very grateful to you."

There was a childish trustfulness about him that made one wish to take care of him. His eyes had a remarkable power of transfiguring him, especially when he smiled.

"What's taking you to Switzerland?" I said.

"Well, now," he replied, "that's a strange story. You'll think it's funny, and I suppose it is funny, but that doesn't make any difference. I've never seen a mountain."

"Oh!"

"No, never. And all my life I've wanted to see one."

"Well, there are mountains in England. Quite big ones in Wales."

"But not what I call a *mountain*. 'Igh—oh, very 'igh, with snow on them all the year round. And ice!—You see, I've always lived at Lewisham, and there are no mountains there—not even 'ills. When I was a little boy my father showed me a picture of mountains—great big ones, with clouds all down the sides

of them—and ever since then I've wanted to see a *real* mountain. I've got that picture still—in my lodgings at Lewisham. I've got it in a frame over my bed, and every morning I look at it and wish I could see a *real* mountain. I know the names and 'eights of 'em all. The Alps and the Andes and the 'Imalayas and the Rockies! Mount Everest and Dapsang and Kilimanjaro and Mount McKinley and Orizaba and Mong Blong—I know 'em all! They 'ave very nice mountains in South America—I often say the names of 'em to myself of a Sunday afternoon just for the sound of 'em—Aconcagua and Mercedario and Gualtieri and Huascán—all more than twenty thousand feet 'igh! Of course, I don't suppose I 'ave their names correct, but that doesn't prevent me from being fascinated by 'em! I thought once I'd go to Wales or Scotland and see the mountains there, but they aren't big enough. So I started to save up, when I was quite a boy, and I reckoned that when I was about fifty I'd 'ave saved enough to be able to go and see the 'Imalayas!"

"Good Heavens," said I.

"I wanted to see Mount Everest—the 'ighest mountain in the world. Twenty-nine thousand and two feet 'igh! Isn't it wonderful?" His eyes were glistening with excitement as he spoke. "It's seven times as 'igh as Ben Nevis, and that's the 'ighest we've got. Seven times 'igher than Ben Nevis! I wouldn't go and see Ben Nevis because I wanted my first mountain to be the biggest in the world. See?"

"Yes—but you aren't going to India!"

"No," he replied, and there was a note of despondency in his voice. "You see, the war came, and I lost a lot of the money I'd saved. Of course, I started to save some more, but things are so expensive now, aren't they? and I soon realized that I'd never be able to save up enough to go to India—not before I was too old, any'ow. That upset me, that did—to think I'd never see Mount Everest! But I said to myself, 'Well, you must do the best you can, and if the mountain won't come to Ma'omet, Ma'omet must go to the mountain the best way 'e can!' That's what I said. 'If you can't go to the 'ighest mountains in the world,' I said, 'you can go to the 'ighest mountains in Europe any'ow!' And so I made up my mind I'd go and see the Alps this summer. That's why I'm going to Switzerland. I'm going to see all of them—from the lowest to the 'ighest. I'd like to see the 'ighest first, but of course that can't be arranged, can it?"

"I'm afraid not."

"I think it would be wonderful to arrive there in the dark, and then waken up in the morning and see Mong Blong! Just open your window—and there it is! Often and often, in Lewisham, I've tried to imagine it, but it isn't easy. All I can see from my bedroom is a railway embankment. Twenty feet 'igh, it is! I've measured it as near as possible, and it's twenty feet 'igh. And Mount Everest is twenty-nine thousand and two!"

"Are you married?" I asked.

"No. No—I'm not married," he replied, a trifle regretfully. "Really, I'm rather a lonely person. Of

course, I might 'ave married, mightn't I, but some'ow I didn't seem to."

I stood up and scanned the sky-line. "Look," I exclaimed, "there's France!"

He rose and stood beside me.

"It's just like England," he exclaimed. "I didn't know France 'ad white cliffs, too! . . ."

We had so little trouble in getting through the customs and the passport examination that I felt even more irritation than if the trouble had been enormous. So much fuss to so little purpose! Expensive officials seized our passports and, without even a pretence of examination, stamped them and returned them to us. Other expensive officials made chalk marks on our luggage without asking us to unlock it, and then we set off for the train. I had reserved a seat, but Mr. Sefton —that was his name—had not reserved one, and so, after I had placed my hand luggage in my compartment, I went to find a seat for him. Fortunately I found one in the carriage next to mine, and then I seized hold of an attendant from the restaurant-car and secured a couple of tickets for the first sitting for dinner. I discovered during the meal that the little man had nothing but English money in his possession. The idea of changing it simply had not occurred to him. Not that it mattered much, except for convenience, for the French people seemed more willing to take English notes than French. But I thought to myself that this poor little adventurer among mountains was setting out on his journey with singularly little equipment of knowledge.

However, trustful, innocent souls such as he contrive amazingly to get through the world without misfortune. I suppose it is because of the appeal they make to stronger people than themselves. This chap had only to look pathetic, and immediately someone would take charge of him. I put myself to immense trouble to arrange some means of washing for him during the journey; for, of course, he did not know that the French railway authorities regard a traveller on their system as a sinner who must be made to suffer, if not hereafter, at all events on their railway. That, no doubt, is why they provide lavatories, but omit to provide either soap or water to use in them. Mr. Sefton's distress at the thought that he might not be able to wash his face and hands before appearing in Switzerland was so acute that I felt prepared to do battle with the entire Continent rather than that his distress should continue; and at Delle, on the frontier, where we were held up for more than an hour because the gentleman whose business it was to pry into our luggage had omitted to turn up at the proper time, I exercised such fierce influence on a person in the station that a lavish supply of soap and hot water was provided for us, and we not only washed but also shaved, and thus became a source of bitter envy to the other travellers. Soon after we left Delle, the Swiss hills began to appear, and as I was anxious to see the effect of them on Mr. Sefton, I joined him in his compartment, where there was now a vacant seat. He sat close to the window and gazed steadily at the hills, but although they seemed to move him profoundly with their re-

mote beauty, I had a feeling that he was disappointed in them. I became certain of this when he turned to me rather wearily—for he had slept hardly at all during the night—and said, "I thought they'd look 'igher!"

"You haven't seen the mountains yet," I replied. "These are only hills."

He brightened up immediately. "I thought there must be something wrong," he exclaimed. "Mind you," he added, as if he were apologizing for being inappreciative of the hills, "they're very nice—very nice indeed—only they aren't—overpowering!" He fumbled for the word "overpowering" before he found it, and I felt that it expressed exactly his feeling about what a mountain should be. Overpowering! His adjective for the hills—*nice*—struck me as altogether the wrong one, but perhaps that was because hills made less appeal to him than mountains. Myself, I like hills better than mountains; they have a friendly look which mountains never have. By the time we got to Interlaken, Mr. Sefton was so tired and sleepy that he had difficulty in keeping awake, and therefore the first mountains we saw affected him less dramatically than I had hoped they would. The truth is, one is prepared for the Swiss mountains altogether too much in advance. If one could come on them suddenly, the dramatic instinct would be completely satisfied; but after travelling for many hours in a state of fatigue through ranges of hills that gradually become ranges of mountains, the novelty seems to wear off, and the mind is filled with unaccountable boredom. Mr. Sefton seemed to take more interest in the lakes at Interlaken than in

the mountains which surrounded them. You know what the colour of glacier water is? I described the Channel as being the colour of pale jade. Lake Thun and Lake Brienz have that colour more permanently fixed, as it were, and Mr. Sefton could hardly be induced to look at anything else but the water. We had some time to wait for the local train in which we were to finish our journey, and I took him to the edge of Lake Thun and told him to put his hand into it. He did so, and drew it out again very quickly.

"Cold?" said I.

"Very," he replied. "And the sun's so warm, too!"

"Glacier water," I explained, "solid ice a few hours ago."

But if I had been disappointed with his feeling for the mountains we saw on the way to Interlaken, I was amply compensated for it by his excitement after we left Interlaken and were on our way to Mürren. The dramatic surprise was provided for us on the journey. Suddenly, we saw a high mountain covered with snow. Wisps of cloud were folded about its head, and there were pine-trees standing in such order on its flanks that they might have been soldiers in massed formation. The river which feeds the lakes flowed by the side of the railway track in a swirl of plunging water, and was joined here and there by streams that ran swiftly down the mountain's side or fell from so great a height that they turned to mist long before they reached the river. Mr. Sefton was on the wrong side of the carriage, but I shouted to him. "Look!" I said, and he came quickly to my window. His eyes widened and his mouth opened.

"Oh!" he said. That was all. The great occasions of our lives never find us prepared with adequate words. Not that I wish to listen to people delivering themselves to fluent rhetoric in the presence of a high mountain or on first beholding Niagara Falls. Mr. Sefton's simple "Oh!" was probably the note of very deep feeling. He did not say any more. He stood there gaping at the mountain until I began to think he had been paralyzed.

"What do you think of it?" I asked, and then repeated the question, for he did not answer.

"I beg your pardon," he said, turning to me in a bewildered way, and I saw that whatever emotion he was feeling at the great spectacle of the mountain, it was not one of joy. There was a look of fear on his face.

"What do you think of it?"

"I—I'm afraid of it," he said.

"Afraid!"

"Yes. I—I'm frightened. I—I don't want to——!"

I got up and took hold of him. "Sit down," I said. "You're tired out. Sit down there in the corner, and shut your eyes!"

I manœuvred him into a corner on the other side of the carriage. "Don't look at it," I advised. "You'll be all right when you've had a sound sleep!"

"Yes—yes, I suppose so," he answered. He closed his eyes and kept them shut for a few moments, and I thought he was actually asleep. But he wasn't. He opened them as we curved round a bend, and I could see that he was gazing in a fascinated way at the gaunt sides of a mountain whose head we could not see.

"Supposing it was to fall on us," he said, and there was terror in his tone.

"Don't be a silly ass!" I replied impatiently.

"But supposing!"

"It won't. It can't. It's been like that for millions of years, and it isn't going to collapse just because you're in the neighbourhood!"

He smiled at that. "No—no, I suppose not. Only——"

"Shut your eyes and don't think about it," I interrupted.

"Very well," he replied in an obedient voice.

At Lauterbrunnen, we descended from the train and got into the funicular railway which climbs up a green mountain for two thousand feet and lands you on a road where an electric tramcar takes you to Mürren. Funicular railways rob me of any courage I possess, and, therefore, I sympathized with Mr. Sefton's alarm as we climbed up the mountain. He said very little during the journey, which was brave of him, for I am sure he was pining for comfortable words; but once, after he had taken a daring look out of the window, he turned to me and moaned, "Oh, there's miles of it yet!" I laughed at that, for his distress was comic, but it was no laughing matter to him, and I hastened to reassure him that all was well. "I'm a bit funky myself on these damned things, but there's no need to feel frightened. Even if the steel cable were to break, there are all sorts of safety devices to prevent accidents." He glanced out of the window at the snow-covered mountains on the other side of the valley.

"It's—it's almost as if they didn't want us to climb them!"

"Can't very well help themselves, can they?" I retorted.

"I don't know so much. They don't look friendly!"

We reached the top of the funicular and got into the tramcar for the last stage of our journey; and as we travelled to Mürren, the amazing panorama of the mountains unfolded itself before our eyes. I told Mr. Sefton what little I knew about them. That was Wengen over there, that little village snuggling on the ledge of a green mountain. The high, humped mountain was the Eiger. Next to it was the Mönch, the next to the Mönch was the Jungfrau. Up the valley ranged mountain after mountain until one passed out of Switzerland into Italy. "Milan's on the other side of them," I said in the casual way one talks on these occasions, as if one had only to trip over a mountain and land in Italy. I saw that his eyes were fixed on the Jungfrau. "She's the highest of them," I said, "that young woman."

"Does 'Jungfrau' mean 'young woman'?" he asked.

"Yes. The Eiger, the Mönch, and the Jungfrau are the Giant, the Monk, and the Young Woman. You can buy some vulgar postcards in any of the villages about here turning the mountains into a dirty love story."

"She looks cold!" he said.

"So would you be if you had snow on your head all the year round!" I replied.

We did not speak again until we got to the terminus

of the tramcar, where I had to see that the right hotel-porter got hold of his luggage. He made very little effort to do this for himself, but stood gaping at the Jungfrau, and I felt some resentment against him.

"Here's your porter," I said brusquely. "If I were you, I'd get some food and a wash, and then I'd go to bed for an hour or two!"

"It must have been very exciting round 'ere," he replied, "when all these things were being made!"

I realized that the first chapter of Genesis had dramatic significance for him. He visualized the creation as a swift and impressive spectacle, wherein Chaos immediately became Order; a great procession of mountains and valleys and lakes and oceans and wide plains of fertile land neatly passing to appointed places!

I yawned and stretched my arms. "I shall be glad of my lunch," I said.

I was out-of-doors pretty early the next morning, but not so early as he was. I found him sitting in front of the huge telescope in the hotel garden, gazing intently at the Jungfrau, which immediately faced the hotel. The valley is about a mile wide at this point, so that details on the mountain cannot be detected by the naked eye. The Black Monk, a pile of elephant-coloured rock more than a thousand feet high, guards the feet of the Jungfrau, and sometimes one may see chamois browsing on the short grass between the upper rocks. I imagined that Mr. Sefton was searching for chamois.

"Good morning!" I said, as I sat down beside him.

He looked round at me in a startled way. "Oh, good morning!" he replied.

"Sleep well?" I went on.

"No, not very well. I suppose it's being strange. I got up during the night and sat at my window for a while, looking at *'er*!" He pointed to the Jungfrau, and thereafter I noticed that whenever he spoke of the mountain he always used a personal pronoun, slightly emphasized, although he referred to other mountains by name. "*She's* not very friendly to-day!" or "There's a lot of cloud on *'er* this morning!"

"I'm sorry you slept badly," I said, and then, indicating the telescope, added, "Seen anything?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Any chamois about?"

"I don't know. I was looking at *'er*!"

"And what do you think of her, eh?"

"*She's* very attractive, but I don't think I'd care to go near *'er*!"

I laughed. "Then you aren't going to do any climbing?" I said.

"No, I don't think so. I suppose it's very difficult."

"Much more difficult than some people imagine," I replied. "No one ought to try a mountain like the Eiger there without a fortnight's training under an experienced guide. I reckon a man would spend a hundred pounds on the climb and training for it, if he did it properly. And no one ought to attempt to climb unless he has trained properly for it."

"That's quite right," he said. "A gentleman in the

hotel this morning told me a party fell into a crevasse a little while ago and were frozen to death!"

"I daresay."

And then we talked about mountaineering, and I told him stories of accidents I had either heard or read, and he listened to me with a sort of frightened pleasure.

"They don't want us up there," he said, gazing almost apprehensively at the Jungfrau's head. "I'm sure they don't want us!"

I had turned the telescope towards the Eiger where, I was told, a party of climbers were to be seen, and was searching the snow when he spoke. "Oh!" I said. "Well, come and have a look at this lot!" I gave him the line of sight, and after some fumbling, he found the party, which consisted of three young American girls and two guides. One of the girls, so I had heard, was a good climber, but the others were new to the game. They were doing the ascent as cheaply as possible, and had taken two guides when, in their raw condition, they ought to have taken three. "What are they doing?" I asked.

"They're coming down—on their 'ands and knees!" he said slowly. "Two of 'em are! It's funny the way they come down. They lift their feet quite 'igh in the air and dig 'em down."

"Yes! They'll be pretty tired when they get off the Eiger. Let me have a look, will you?"

I regarded the descending party for a while without speaking. It was clear to me that the guides were rather bored by the business of conducting the young ladies

down the mountain. The girl who could climb was standing upright and facing the descent, but the other two evidently were afraid to look down, or else found descending easier on all fours. They did not appear to have picks with them. Indeed, I afterwards learned that they had proposed to go up the Eiger with alpenstocks! The guides, however, had made them leave their sticks behind and had decided to make footholds for the entire party with their own picks. The length of their stride, however, was greater than that of the amateur girls, both of whom were rather short-legged, and so these poor dears in trying to stretch the manly span got very tired, and finally resolved to forgo the assistance of footholds and come down on their hands and knees. "They'll be a long time getting down," I said to Mr. Sefton. "They'll probably have to spend the night in the hotel at the foot of the Eiger."

"They ought not to have gone up," he replied.

"Why?"

"The mountain doesn't want them. That's why!"

"Rot! Besides, they can't help wanting to go up. You'll be pining to climb the Eiger or the Jungfrau when you've been here a day or two."

"Oh, no, I won't," he said. "Not the Jungfrau any'ow!"

"Well, you'll get very bored here. You don't play tennis; do you?" He shook his head. "And if you don't climb!—Well, you can't sit in this garden and gape at the Jungfrau all day long. Mountains get very boring after you've seen them several times. There isn't much else to do. Swiss villages are not very interest-

ing, and Mürren is perhaps the least interesting of all of them. Terribly tidy, all of them! Uninspiring cleanliness—that's the chief characteristic of Switzerland! When you've seen a little more of this country, you'll notice that there aren't any pretty women in it. Utility is the quality most demanded in a Swiss woman, and so the race seems to have bred pretty women clean out of existence!"

He smiled amiably at me. "You *do* say some odd things."

"It's true," I replied. "The mountains don't leave the Swiss much room for romantic emotions. They've got to fight very hard for the means of life, and the only woman that's worth anything to a Swiss is the woman who will work like a horse. There's a soulless sort of neatness in this country, a devastating tidiness, forced on them by circumstances, which has left them without any inspiration. Go down into Mürren and look in the shops! You'll see the same dull factory-made carvings and the same dull home-made lace there that you'll see in every village in Switzerland—neat, tidy, utterly spiritless. They've got craftsmanship and industry, the Swiss, but no spiritual exaltation and, therefore, no art!"

"Well, perhaps they don't need it," he said. "They've got the mountains!"

"Yes—their pride and their ruin!"

And then I did what I could not have believed I'd do—I invited him to accompany me on the following day to Grindelwald to see the upper glacier. He consented, after I had told him that it was easily accessi-

ble—that he could, in fact, see much of it without even getting off the road; and then I left him, sitting at the telescope, which he immediately turned to the Jungfrau's head.

On the following day, we went to Grindelwald, which is just on the other side of the Eiger from Mürren, but has to be approached in a roundabout fashion by railway. We took a carriage up to the glacier, for Mr. Sefton, I soon discovered, was not much of a walker. I had proposed a twenty-mile tramp to him, but the thought of it nearly paralyzed him. We stood for a while in front of the great spilth of ice in silence. There must be millions of tons of it slowly creeping down the great cleft in the mountain, each year pushing its way nearer to the road. The stream of water which flows from its feet must have had its course diverted many times by the advancing ice. Mr. Sefton gazed about him, rather like a bewildered sparrow, and then said, "It looks just like that sticky sort of sweetmeat they call crême-de-menthe, with powdered sugar on it!" And, indeed, that was true. Mr. Sefton's comparisons were homely and commonplace, but they were surprisingly accurate. He constantly identified natural scenery with human things. He was not content to think of mountains as high heaps of rock and earth and vegetation and snow, the accumulation of myriads of shells thrown up from primeval seas before the human race had yet appeared on the earth, but must identify them with the common stuff of his own life or, more romantically, invest them with terrifying powers of a superhuman

sort. That very morning, while sitting at the telescope, we had heard the noise of an avalanche. One often hears the noise, without, however, seeing the falling snow; but on this occasion my eyes happened to be looking at the very spot where the avalanche fell. For a few moments, I thought I was looking at a waterfall, but suddenly I realized that it was the avalanche and that I could show it to Mr. Sefton. We watched the great rush of snow pouring over the edge of the rock until it dwindled and then ceased. "Just like sugar falling off a scoop!" said Mr. Sefton. His romantic moods, however, interested me more than his commonplace ones. I had persuaded him, not without difficulty, to go into the grotto which had been tunnelled out of the glacier, and he had been immensely thrilled at the blue light of the sun shining through the glacier and the constant flow of water down the sides of the grotto. Then, when we had emerged again into the daylight, he said, "I suppose there are things like that on *'er*!"

"Glaciers, yes, but no grottoes!" I replied.

"I suppose if you were to fall into a crevasse," he continued, "it 'ud be something like the inside of that grotto!"

"Yes, but a lot worse. You probably wouldn't be able to get out of it, and so you'd be frozen to death!" And then I told him the old story, new to him, of the young guide who had fallen into a crevasse and been embedded in the ice. Forty years later, the glacier gave up its dead. The body was still the body of a young, fresh-coloured man, kept uncorrupted by the ice. An

old, withered woman had come to see the body and had identified it as that of her lover of forty years before!

"She wouldn't let 'im go," said Mr. Sefton.

"But the poor old soul couldn't help herself," I exclaimed. "She'd married somebody else and was a grandmother!"

"I mean the mountain!"

"Oh! Well, she did let him go in the end!"

"Yes, when she'd finished with 'im! Fancy that old woman seeing 'im again, just like 'e was, young and 'andsome, and 'er old and ugly! Any'ow, *she* didn't spoil 'is looks, did she? That was kind of 'er!"

We sat for a while on the side of the road, gazing at the glacier, and he talked in a vague, speculative way about the future of the world. "Supposing all the glaciers on all the mountains was to crawl down and down until they 'ad covered up everything—oh!" He shuddered. " 'Orrible, wouldn't it be! Nothing but ice everywhere! I don't see what's to prevent it really! The sun don't seem able to melt it quick enough, and per'aps 'undreds of years 'ence there won't be nothing 'ere nor nowhere, but ice. No grass, no trees, no animals, no people, no anything—but ice!"

"Well, I don't think you need worry about it. You won't be here to see it!"

We returned to Mürren in silence, for we were tired, and as the funicular climbed up the slow length of its two thousand feet, we sat back and watched the *Alpenglut* covering the mountain-tops with its soft warmth. What is one to say about such beauty as

that? So commonplace and so magnificent, so familiar and yet so profoundly moving! Nature performs her delicate miracles so often that we soon cease to find anything miraculous in them. But how marvellous they remain! Mr. Sefton seemed able to sit back in that climbing carriage and contemplate the glowing peaks without a tremor. The fear he had of mountains —and it seemed to grow with familiarity—left him for a little while, and when I turned to him, I saw that his wistful, wizened face was transfigured by that evening loveliness. I felt a sudden rush of affection for him. I imagined his dull life in a dull London suburb made glorious by his dreams of high mountains—Aconcagua, Mercedario, Gualtieri and Huascán—and my heart filled with pity for him when I realized that his dream of far loveliness had been turned into terror. With what denials had he earned the money to make this pilgrimage—only to find that what had exalted him in his dreams frightened him in reality! I was glad that the *Alpenglut* had made the mountains beautiful for him again. Some of its golden orange glow shone in his face, and for a few moments that plain, unimpressive little man became very beautiful: he had achieved his desire and was transfigured by faith. But the spell of tranquillity lasted only for a few moments. Suddenly the peace departed from his face, and fear filled his eyes again.

"What's the matter!" I said in a startled voice.

"Oh, she's dead!" he gasped, as his hands clutched his cheeks.

"Dead!"

He pointed to the Jungfrau, and I saw what had happened. The *Alpenglut* vanishes very quickly, and the warm, live, golden orange flush on the face of the mountains is replaced by a cold, dead whiteness. The change is almost instantaneous, and the suggestion of bleak death is inevitable. But I could not permit the little man to let his mind be filled with ghastly thoughts, and so, when we got out of the funicular, I made him look across the valley to the village of Wengen where the lit chalets seemed, in the descending dusk, like illuminated primroses growing close to the ground. I thought that perhaps so homely a sight as that would take some of the terror from his thoughts, and for a while he was assuaged, but I could see his eyes wandering involuntarily to the great cold, dead-white mountain whose head was now curled with darkening clouds. Terribly forbidding she looked in that half-light: a beautiful, cold virgin, austere and aloof from the common conflicts and utterly indifferent to any devotions that might be paid to her. The Black Monk, a mass of brutal rock, had a look of sensual cruelty, and the imagination was not strained by the thought of him as a great hulking grey eunuch, jealously guarding the white virgin.

"She'd draw you up there," I heard Mr. Sefton saying, "and she'd promise you things, but she wouldn't give them to you. She'd bury you in ice!"

"Here," I said, "you'd better have a stiff whisky and soda when you get into the hotel. You've made me as sloppily morbid as you are. Pull yourself together, man! The Jungfrau is only a mountain!

That's all. Rocks! D'you hear? Rocks and dirt and snow!"

He smiled wanly at me. "Yes! Yes, that's all!" he said. "Just rocks and dirt and—snow!"

Mist was filling the valley when we alighted from the tramcar. It came down in swift squadrons of cloud that climbed and descended until the mountains all about us were hidden from sight.

"I wish I could see *'er*," Mr. Sefton said fretfully, as I prepared to leave him.

"Why?" I demanded.

"I can't see what *she's* doing be'ind all that mist. And I know *she's* up to something. That's 'ow *she* catches 'em—when they can't see what *she's* doing!"

"Oh, go to hell!" I said angrily, and left him.

In the early morning, before the sun had risen, one of those sudden storms of wind which the Swiss call a "foehn" or sirocco, drove all the mist out of the valley, and raged about the hotels and chalets as if it meant to blow them down. One could hear the pine-trees swaying and swinging as the wind beat them and tore at their branches. Once, my heart went into my mouth, for a great gust caught the side of my hotel, and, for a moment, I thought the whole place would go tumbling down into the valley below.

"Old Sefton won't like this," I said to myself, as I turned over in bed and tried to sleep again. But sleep would not return, and, after tossing about for a time, and cursing Sefton for filling my mind with mawkish notions about mountains, I got up and had an early breakfast. I decided that I must somehow make my

thoughts normal again, and as the "foehn" had died down and there was no mist left in the valley, I asked for sandwiches and went off for a long, scrambling walk. The mountains were clearly defined in the strong light of the morning, and I could almost see the crystals in the snow; and I was tempted to go down into the valley and climb up one of the easier ascents on the other side. But I did not yield to the temptation. Above my head, beyond the pine-trees, I could hear the tinkling of cow-bells, and I resolved to keep to grassy places. A couple of hours later, I lay down on the ground to rest, and for a while I looked at the mountains opposite to me without much thought of them. Gradually, I became aware of the awful hardness of them. There were no blurred edges that morning, nor had the mountains that look of insubstantiality which they often have in twilight, so that they appear like immense pieces of painted cardboard made for a theatrical scene. I have sometimes fancied in the evening that if I were to go behind the mountains, I should find them supported by the "stays" and pulleys used to hold up a "set" on the stage. But on this morning, after the swift rage of the night, there was substantiality in them, and they stood up in the sunlight like great, grinding gods in whom there is no mercy. The Jungfrau thrust her glittering head high above the Black Monk, whose grey hide was wet with dew, and I understood how easily a man of imagination unnourished by experience might endow her with the qualities of a cruel and proud and lovely woman. In my imagination, when I thought of her as a human

being, she was a lovely, but empty-minded woman, cruel, not through deliberation, but out of sheer nullity of character. The Jungfrau, to me, was a beautiful imbecile. I spent the morning among the pine-trees until hunger hauled me down to my hotel again, and it was not until the afternoon that I went to Mr. Sefton's hotel. I inquired of the concierge about him, and was astounded to hear that he had left the hotel immediately after lunch. There was a note for me.

I took it into the garden and read it. He begged my pardon for going off without saying "Good-bye," but he was sure I would forgive him when he told me that he could not stay in Mürren any longer:

I'm going home again. I know it's silly of me to behave like this, but I can't help it. She frightens me, that's what she does. I thought at first she didn't want us here, and all night in that terrible storm I lay in bed and trembled because I thought she was angry with us. But when it was over, and I got up and looked at her out of the window, I could see she wanted me! You'll think I'm a foolish old man, I'm sure, but I saw her beckoning to me! She wants me up there, and I'm frightened, so I'm going home. Thank you very much for your kindness to me. I don't want you to think I'm not grateful. I am. I know well I can't have been much company for you, and that made it all the kinder of you to bother yourself with me. But I am grateful to you, although my running away like this doesn't look like it, without saying "Good-bye" or anything. It's been a bitter disappointment to me, but perhaps it's a good thing in the end. I shall feel more content with Lewisham in the future than I have in the past, anyhow! I don't feel I want to see any more mountains. Good-bye, and thank you again.

"Poor old idiot!" I said to myself, as I folded his letter and put it in my pocket. I got up and stretched myself. Suddenly, I had a feeling of boredom with mountains. There they were, standing as they had stood for thousands, perhaps millions, of years, cluttered up together—oh, they were boring! I, too, would go away from Mürren. I would go down to the lakes for a while, and on to Italy. I glanced round the garden, and then, half contemptuously, murmured, "Well, I suppose I've seen the last of you, Mr. Sefton!" and went back to my hotel. On the following day, I would pack up and clear out of Mürren. My resolve to do so was strengthened by the fact that in the evening there was a tremendous fall of rain followed by a "foehn," and then, at night, heavy, damping mist that filled me with depression. "Old Sefton wasn't such a fool, after all," I said to myself. "He went just in time to escape from this! . . ."

My luggage was ready to be taken down to the tramcar, and I had finished my lunch and said my good-byes to the casual acquaintances I had made during my stay, when I heard the news. The concierge was telling a lady that there had been an accident, and I caught the word. "What's that?" I said.

"An accident, sir! A gentleman!"

Suddenly I thought of Sefton. "What sort of an accident?" I asked, but he could not give me any details. He had only just heard of it, and knew no more than this, that there had been one.

"Tell the porter I'll go by the later train," I said to the concierge, and went off hurriedly to the hotel

where Sefton had been a guest. The manager was standing at the door of the entrance-hall. He did not speak. He made a slight, despairing gesture with his hands.

"Is it Mr. Sefton?" I said.

He nodded his head.

I followed him into the hotel, where people were standing about in groups, talking of the accident which was now generally known. The manager and I went into his office.

"What's happened?" I asked. "Is he dead?"

"Yes," he replied, "but I do not know what happened. He was found on the Jungfrau!"

"On the Jungfrau! But he left for England yesterday!"

"I know. But he was found on the Jungfrau. I do not know why he was there. His luggage was registered through to London!"

It struck me as almost comic that the manager should speak in that slightly complaining manner. How could a man whose luggage had been registered in an orderly way think of doing anything so unusual as to be found dead on the Jungfrau!

"Where is he now?" I demanded.

"In Lauterbrunnen," he replied. "His body was brought down by guides this morning."

I had just time to catch the train by which I had first intended to depart from Mürren, and an hour later I was in the valley and hurrying to the place where Sefton's body was lying. I satisfied an official of my right to see him, and went into the room. I said at

the beginning of this story that there was something about him which made one wish to take care of him, and in death that desire was not diminished. I do not think I am a sentimental man, but when I drew the covering from Sefton's face and looked on that little, wistful man, on whom romance had played a paltry trick, I felt intensely a desire to take care of him in the next world far more completely than I had done during the short time I had known him in this one. His face was bruised and cut and swollen, but it retained the dog-like look of appeal which it had worn in life. He was a lost dog of a man, and no one with any kindliness in his heart can remain unfriendly to a lost dog.

The official murmured something in German to me, but I was too much moved by the sight of Sefton to attempt to understand him, and, thinking that I had no knowledge of German, he spoke to me again in French.

"He must have fallen," he said. "His legs!"

They were badly broken, as were his arms. His face was the least injured part of him.

"But how did he get up there?" I said. "He was going home to England!"

"Ah, m'sieu, how can we tell why any man does anything?" the official replied.

I came away from the place where his body was laid, and returned to Mürren. I had to stay there that night, but I left in the morning. The sky was cloudless and blue, and the sun sent warm rays shining and shimmering down the mountain sides into the valley.

I could hear cow-bells tinkling above my head, and, near at hand, the happy exclamations of gaily dressed men and women in the tennis-courts. Three little Swiss girls, embracing each other, went by me, singing a child's song that had been sung in that valley by generations of children. I heard the noise of an avalanche, but did not look to see the falling snow. Streams of white water fell dizzily down from great heights and merged in the green rush of the river. Infinitely lovely were the mountains on that morning of sunshine and fair weather, and high above them all, I saw the glittering head of the Jungfrau raised to Heaven, with no sign that she knew or understood that a little old man from Lewisham had brought his dreams to her feet and there had died.

THE CONJUROR

I

The stout man leant forward and tapped Mr. Bellis on the arm. "Seen this new conjuror at the 'Ippodrome?" he said.

"No," Mr. Bellis answered tartly. It was the fifth time that evening that he had been asked the question. He was a conjuror himself, with the finest Society practice in Great Britain, as he frequently and proudly asserted. Little boys declined to have any other conjuror than Mr. Bellis to entertain their guests at birthday parties. The great Devant himself had once, in private, said, "Bellis, you're my master!" Maskelyne, who was not a conjuror at all, but an illusionist, always asserted that "Bellis is the boy!" On top of all his reputation and praise, to be asked, five times in a single evening, if he had seen "this new conjuror at the 'Ippodrome" was certainly a bit thick! Of course, in a dead-alive hole like Westsea, anybody who successfully palmed a few cards might seem a marvellous fellow, but Mr. Bellis did think that even in Westsea, to which his doctor had sent him for a rest, people might know something about him. It wasn't as if Bellis was a common name. If a chap was to come into a hotel and write "Harry Lauder" in the register, people

would be pretty certain to connect him with something. And they really ought, even in Westsea, to have enough gumption and knowledge of the world to connect the name of Bellis with sleight-of-hand. Pure sleight-of-hand! None of your wizardry and illusion and juggling! None of your pretence at conjuring, when all you did was done with the aid of elaborate spectacle and much scenery. Mr. Bellis prided himself on the fact that he not only had the largest Society practice in Great Britain, but that he was the finest exponent of pure sleight-of-hand alive in the world. So he said "No!" abruptly and quite snappily, in the hope that the fat man would have the sense not to go on making an ass of himself any longer. This hope was delusive.

"'E's a cough-drop!" the fat man continued, totally unaware of any tartness in Mr. Bellis's tone.

"Oh!"

"Yes, 'e's a cure! Reg'lar caution, 'e is!"

It occurred to Mr. Bellis that the fat man had not got beyond the letter "C" when he was learning how to spell.

"You should go and see 'im!" said the fat man. "I calls 'im a card!"

"You called him a cough-drop a second ago. And a cure! And a caution!"

"'E's all that!" the fat man complacently replied.

Mr. Bellis gave it up. What was the use of being sarcastic to a chap who was mentally afflicted! . . .

"If you think of goin' to the 'Ippodrome," the fat man said, "I'll go with you. I'd like to see that conjuror again. 'E's a fair . . . !"

"Caution, card, cure *and* cough-drop!" Mr. Bellis interrupted.

"I was goin' to say 'knock-out'!" the fat man continued, "but them'll do!"

Mr. Bellis thought to himself that he would see the fat man damned before he went to the Hippodrome with him, but he did not say so. He pleaded ill-health and the necessity for early retirement.

"Do you good," the fat man insisted. "I never seen conjuring like it, an' I don't expect you 'ave!"

That was too much for Mr. Bellis. He fled from the fat man, fearful lest, if he stayed with him longer, he should do him an injury.

But that evening, after dinner, he unaccountably found himself standing in front of the main entrance to the Westsea Hippodrome. In the middle of the big bill that was posted on to a movable hoarding which stood inside the vestibule was the new conjuror's name, "Diabolo," followed by the single word, "Magician." The type was not the largest. "Diabolo" was not a "star turn," and therefore had no right to large type at the top or the foot of the bill. He was just one of the ruck of performers! . . . Mr. Bellis's contempt for the fat man grew. Yet four other persons had commended the conjuror to Mr. Bellis! The chap must have something in him. A frame full of photographs was suspended inside the vestibule, and Mr. Bellis walked towards it. There might be a photograph of the conjuror in it. But there was none. Photographs of an abundant lady in a glittering sort of dress, and a comedian with a painted face, and "a charming sou-

brette" whose physique was as meagre as the other lady's was large, and several other performers were exhibited in this and other frames; but there was no photograph of Diabolo. "Extra turn, that's what he is," Mr. Bellis murmured to himself, "or else a try-out!"

He turned to go away, but, just as he was about to step into the street, he turned back. "Might as well have a look at the chap," he thought. "That can't do any harm."

He paid for a seat in the orchestra stalls, and a few moments later was sitting in it. He glanced round the theatre and was astonished to see that it was nearly full. The cheaper seats were crammed. People were standing up at the back of the pit. Up in the gallery, men and women were perilously leaning against the protecting rails. He could feel excitement in the air. The showman in him recognized the intensity in the buzz of conversation that flew round the auditorium.

"Seems to have got this lot all right!" he said to himself.

At the moment he saw the fat man sitting on the opposite side of the theatre and smiling at him, as much as to say, "So you 'ad to come after all!" Mr. Bellis turned away in confusion. He felt annoyed.

II

When the number "7" was inserted in the little frames on either side of the proscenium the audience, which had listened to the other performers with impatience or lack of interest, suddenly braced itself and

became excitedly attentive. There was no applause, but Mr. Bellis could feel the attention growing. That queer electric sensation which only comes when an audience has been fused into a single unit ran through him and made him sit up in his seat, although he had no intention of letting himself be "put upon." Catch an old hand like him being bulldozed by anybody! Not likely! This Diabolo chap might put it over a crowd of Westsea simps, but he wasn't going to put anything over on George Butt Bellis. Not likely!

The curtain rose, and Mr. Bellis was impressed when he saw that the stage was as plainly furnished as it would have been had he himself been performing. "Looks as if he was a conjuror," he reflected, "and not one of these illusionists pretending to be a conjuror!" A small table stood in the centre of the stage. Near to it stood a chair. No other effects were visible —no gorgeously decorated apparatus, no highly coloured scenery, no fake of any kind. Indeed, Mr. Bellis began to think that the stage furnishings were too meagre. Diabolo was evidently a hard-up performer, unable to provide himself with adequate apparatus. He would probably do a lot of card tricks and wind up with the old dodge of catching coins in the air! While these thoughts passed through Mr. Bellis's mind, Diabolo stepped out of the wings on to the stage, and as he did so Mr. Bellis was instantly aware that something was missing.

What it was he was unable to say at once. Then he realized that the thing which was missing was a waxed moustache. The realization shocked Mr. Bellis. Fancy

any self-respecting conjuror coming on to the stage without the ends of his moustache sticking out like bayonets! This chap had no moustache at all! He *would* call himself "Diabolo"! Cheap, silly, sensational sort of name that no first-rate conjuror would use. Compare it with George Butt Bellis! No comparison at all!

"Diabolo!" Mr. Bellis said half-aloud with a sneer, and while he sneered he found himself sniffing the air. "Funny smell in this theatre," he thought. "Place stinks. Don't suppose it's been properly cleaned for years. Wants fumigating badly!"

His contemptuous thoughts were abruptly ended by the trick which was then performed by Diabolo. "That's pretty good!" he admitted to himself. "Not bad at all! There's something in the chap! Might make quite a good conjuror if he had someone to show him things. No style, that's his defect. What he wants is a bit of class!"

It was quite a good idea, Mr. Bellis thought, to do the tricks as simply as possible. No fuss with magic wands, no humbugging patter, scarcely any display. Mr. Bellis paid close attention to the next trick. It puzzled him. "I can't have been watching close enough," he said; "I've missed something!" He had not seen how it was done, nor could he guess how it was done. Extremely well done, anyhow! Diabolo might have a silly name and no style, but he knew how to perform sleight-of-hand. Really Mr. Bellis was quite glad he had come. He wished that he had watched the tricks with greater attention. Annoying not to see how they

were worked. Diabolo's hands were good—regular conjuror's hands! Mr. Bellis looked at his own—long palms and long flexible fingers—and acknowledged that they were no finer than Diabolo's.

The conjuror stepped to the front of the stage, and as he did so Mr. Bellis was again aware of the queer smell in the theatre. "This place ought to be reported," he said. "It isn't sanitary."

The conjuror was inviting someone from the audience to step on to the stage. Immediately three young men stood up and offered themselves.

"One will be enough," the conjuror said; "but all three of you can come if you like."

They did like, and presently, looking sheepish and shy, they came out of the wings and stood in a clumsy group at the side of the stage. The conjuror again addressed the audience. He would require the loan of a Treasury note for a pound from some member of the audience. Would any lady or gentleman oblige?

"Yes," said Mr. Bellis, standing up, "I will."

He was resolved to see how this trick was done. He thought a little excitedly that perhaps he could give Diabolo a fright.

"Will you please look at the note?" Diabolo said.

Mr. Bellis looked at it.

"Read the number of it to yourself, and then show it to your neighbours," Diabolo continued, and Mr. Bellis did as he was bid. This was an old trick. Mr. Bellis could do this with his eyes shut.

"You will remember the number of the note?" said Diabolo.

"Yes," Mr. Bellis replied.

"Better write it down on a piece of paper," Diabolo suggested, and Mr. Bellis, reseating himself, did so. He wasn't going to let Diabolo see him writing the number down. He was going to conceal all *his* movements from him. When Greek meets Greek, etc.!

"Now," said the conjuror, "will you please place the note inside an envelope and give it to one of the gentlemen on the stage?"

Mr. Bellis had not got an envelope, but a lady sitting near to him had one in her bag and she gave it to him. He then placed the note inside it, and, with a feeling that Mr. Diabolo was about to have a rough time—not that Mr. Bellis meant to spoil his show: honour among conjurors, etc.—he handed it to one of the volunteers.

The conjuror then held his arms in the air and addressed the young man to whom Mr. Bellis had given the envelope containing the note. "Please put the envelope in the right-hand pocket of my coat," he said. The young man advanced towards him and then hesitated. "Or into my left-hand pocket, if you prefer it." The young man hesitated no longer; he put the envelope into the conjuror's right-hand pocket.

"You will notice," Diabolo said to the audience, "that I have not handled the envelope or the note and that my arms have remained in the air above my head ever since the envelope came on to the stage. I will keep them there until the trick is performed." Then he turned to the young man who had put the envelope

into his pocket and said, "You are certain that the envelope is where you put it?"

The young man said "Yes."

"Make sure, will you?"

The young man thrust his hand into the conjuror's pocket, and as he did so his expression changed. "It's gone!" he said.

"Gone?" said the conjuror.

"Oh, jolly good!" said Mr. Bellis to himself. "Jolly good!"

"But you put it in, did you not?" Diabolo continued.

"Yes."

"Then where is it?"

"I don't know!" the young man replied, grinning feebly.

"Well, if it *has* gone, perhaps I may put down my hands. May I?"

The young man nodded his head, and Diabolo dropped his arms. "I'm glad," he said. "I was getting tired of holding them up!" He turned to Mr. Bellis. "Do you mind looking in your pocket-book?" he said.

Mr. Bellis felt that something was wrong. His professional pride was upset. This was not the way in which to do the trick. The chap could undoubtedly do a bit of conjuring, *but* he had no style. There ought to have been some smart patter at this point in the performance, a good joke or a few bright remarks of the sort that would make the volunteers look foolish without looking silly, if you understand what Mr. Bellis meant. A conjuror ought to chaff a chap without

hurting his feelings. See? That was what Mr. Bellis meant, and here was this Diabolo letting go a good chance to chaff three chaps and put the whole audience in a good temper. Cruel, it was, to see a man neglecting his opportunities and doing his job badly. Really, Mr. Bellis would like to have a little chat with Diabolo, who had the makings of a first-class conjuror in him, and give him a few tips. It might be worth his while to take Diabolo into partnership. "Pupil of George Butt Bellis, the celebrated Society sleight-of-hand artist!" Look well on his bills, that would! . . .

While these thoughts were running through Mr. Bellis's mind, he was taking his pocket-book out of his pocket and very slowly (for he had the good showman's sense of effect) opening it. There it was, the note whose number he had taken, resting in its place under the little elastic straps! The sight gave Mr. Bellis a jar, for he suddenly realized that he had not seen through the trick. He was underestimating the chap's quality. Evidently Diabolo was a much better conjuror than Mr. Bellis had imagined. Come to think of it, Mr. Bellis could not see how this trick had been performed. Diabolo had neither touched nor seen the note. He had not approached Mr. Bellis, and nobody knew better than Mr. Bellis that Diabolo and he were not confederates. How the devil had he done it? Mr. Bellis had a good mind to come again on the next night and watch the trick being done. Somebody else could provide the note while he watched. . . . Almost uncanny in its cleverness! . . .

He interrupted himself to listen to Diabolo.

"If the lady who gave the envelope to the gentleman will open her bag, I think she'll find the envelope inside it," he said.

The lady opened her bag. The envelope was inside it. "Gaw!" said Mr. Bellis; "this chap's nearly as good as me!"

He sat very tight in his seat, resolved that he would not miss a movement that Diabolo made during the performance of the succeeding tricks. "His lack of style is really style," he said to himself. "He bluffs 'em by not bluffing 'em!" All his life Mr. Bellis had declared that the *slowness* of the hand deceived the eye. Quickness of the hand deceived nobody. This chap, Diabolo, had learnt Mr. Bellis's motto more thoroughly even than Mr. Bellis. Some of his movements were so deliberate that they were like slow-motion pictures. A smart fellow, no doubt of that.

His next trick startled Mr. Bellis. Diabolo asked one of his three volunteers to place a borrowed half-crown on any spot that pleased him, and the young man, obviously looking for an unlikely spot, placed the coin on the head of the man who played the big drum in the orchestra. The drummer, who was bald, was not pleased, but the audience was.

"Now," said Diabolo, "I will make that half-crown rise off that gentleman's head and go to any place you choose, and the audience will be able to see it rise up on its edge and move through the air and fall into its new place! . . ."

"Gaw!" said Mr. Bellis, "that's a bit steep!"

"Where shall I send it?" Diabolo asked.

"Into my hand," the young man replied, holding out his open palm.

"Very well!" said Diabolo. He turned towards the coin and addressed it. "Do what the gentleman says!" he commanded, and instantly the coin rose up on its edge and took off from the bald drummer's head as easily as an eagle takes off from her nest, and flew through the air, slowly and visibly, until it landed with a little plonk in the young man's palm!

"Mesmerism!" said Mr. Bellis, giving himself a shake. "That's what it is! Mesmerism!"

He had read many accounts of conjuring and illusion in India, and had been sceptical of the explanation sometimes given, that the performer first hypnotized his audience and then suggested to it that it had seen feats performed which in fact were not performed at all. This trick almost persuaded Mr. Bellis to believe that there was something in suggestion.

The last trick performed that evening was of the disappearing lady sort. Diabolo told the audience that he would make the three gentlemen who had kindly volunteered to help him in his performance disappear off the stage and would cause them to appear again in any part of the theatre that the audience selected.

"Now he's going to be funny," Mr. Bellis murmured to himself, "and he has to stoop to illusion for it!" Diabolo fell a peg or two in Mr. Bellis's estimation.

There was a look of some uneasiness on the faces of each of the young men as Diabolo instructed them to stand in a line in front of the footlights. "Where's his apparatus?" Mr. Bellis asked himself. "Gaw! he

isn't going to do the disappearing lady trick without any apparatus!"

Mr. Bellis felt himself coming over all queer. He frankly acknowledged that he was mystified. Any fairly competent illusionist could perform a disappearing trick well enough to humbug an intelligent audience, but, hang it all! there had to be some apparatus. Here was this Diabolo chap proposing to make three solid youths vanish off the stage, and there wasn't a ha'porth of apparatus visible anywhere. Probably the whole thing was just a piece of cod! . . .

And then Diabolo said "Go," and instantly the place where the three young men stood knew them no more.

"Gaw!" said Mr. Bellis; "he's done it!"

He could scarcely sit still while the rest of the illusion was performed. Diabolo asked the audience to say where the young men were to be placed, and, out of the confusion of replies, professed to hear a majority of persons say, "In their seats!"

"Very good!" he exclaimed. "There they are!"

And there, each in his seat, a little pale and shaken, sat the three young men.

"It isn't possible!" said Mr. Bellis. "It can't be done!"

Diabolo bowed to the applauding audience and the curtain fell, and Mr. Bellis, feeling as if he had forgotten all that he ever knew about sleight-of-hand, rose from his seat and left the theatre. The fat man met him in the vestibule.

"Didn't I tell you 'e was a cough-drop?" he said.

"You did," Mr. Bellis answered, "and he is!"

One of the young men who had vanished at the magician's word came out of the theatre. Mr. Bellis touched him on the shoulder.

"Excuse me," he said, "but I'm a conjuror myself, and I'd like to know just what happened to you in that disappearing trick."

The young man looked at him apprehensively. "I'd rather not talk about it," he said, and hurried away.

"There!" Mr. Bellis murmured, "just as I thought! Confederates! All the same, it was a pretty good trick. I'll come again to-morrow night and watch it."

The manager of the theatre, a dapper little person in evening dress, was greeting his friends as they left. Mr. Bellis went up to him and introduced himself. "My name's Bellis," he said, "George Butt Bellis. You probably know it."

"I do, indeed, and I'm very happy to meet you, Mr. Bellis. Well, what do you think of Diabolo? Bit of a knock-out, isn't he?"

"Pretty good! Pretty good!" Mr. Bellis replied. "Stuff's old, of course, and he hasn't any style. Still, he's pretty good. Where d'you get him from?"

"He's new to the profession," the manager replied. "As a matter of fact, this is his first engagement. I only put him on as an extra turn, but he's turned into a show. I signed him on for another week, and if I can get him to stay for another fortnight I will. We've never done such business! . . ."

"I doubled the takings at the Liverpool Empire the week I was there," Mr. Bellis interrupted.

"I don't doubt it, Mr. Bellis," the manager replied. "Not for a minute. But if you'll allow me to say so, it's a very different matter for George Butt Bellis to double the takings at the Liverpool Empire and for an unknown chap like this Diabolo to pack the Westsea Hippodrome for a fortnight in the middle of the dead season. We've never had such takings even in the good season, with stars top, middle and bottom of the bill. I'm looking for a bit of promotion out of this for myself. I found the chap. He's agreed to let me be his agent! . . ."

Mr. Bellis made a wet blanket of himself. "Just a craze," he said, "a mere passing, ephemeral craze! That's all! He hasn't got the groundings of a good conjuror, and nobody can last in the business—profession, I mean to say—unless he has a good grounding. As David Devant used to say to me, 'Bellis, my boy, technique—that's what matters! And you've got it!' I remember old Maskelyne telling me . . ."

"Excuse me, Mr. Bellis," the manager interrupted, hurrying away. "Just want to speak to a friend."

"Huh!" Mr. Bellis muttered to himself. "I let a bit of the hot air out of him! Him and his Diabolo!"

III

On the following evening Mr. Bellis was again in the stalls of the Hippodrome, and again the theatre was crammed to its capacity with an eager, excited and, it seemed to him, anxious audience, which listlessly attended to the "turns" which preceded Diabolo's. Mr. Bellis made up his mind that this time he would

volunteer to assist the conjuror in his performance. "He won't be able to put anything over me at close quarters," he said to himself. "Let him try his disappearing dodge on *me*!"

He was astonished to discover that nearly all the tricks performed by Diabolo were different from those he had performed on the previous evening. "He certainly has a repertoire of stuff," he said to himself, as he watched the card tricks being done. The fact that he could not see how they were done did not annoy Mr. Bellis. He knew that any first-class conjuror can do card tricks so skilfully that even first-class conjurors cannot detect the sleight-of-hand. He himself had deceived, and been deceived by, the ablest conjurors in Great Britain. He hoped, however, to spot the deception in the more elaborate tricks. His professional pride, indeed, was piqued because he had not discovered it on the previous evening. That fact, although he did not acknowledge this even to himself, made him subconsciously regard the new conjuror with respect. Here was a rival worthy of his opposition. He was slightly disconcerted when he found that Diabolo's programme had been changed, but he consoled himself with the reflection that he was now so keenly on the alert that he would be able to solve the new tricks as easily as if he had seen them performed before; and when Diabolo called for volunteers Mr. Bellis was the first person to rise from his seat and go on to the stage. He was followed by two men, one older than himself and the other younger. Neither had assisted on the previous night. Evidently no tricks were to be performed that

evening that would require the help of confederates. . . .

Diabolo invited Mr. Bellis and the others to tie him up as securely as they could. He allowed them to handcuff him and to put manacles on his legs. That done, he asked them to rope him in any way they liked. "I'll rope him all right!" Mr. Bellis said, and proceeded to do so. And as he roped him he was aware of the odd smell that had offended him on the previous night.

Diabolo watched Mr. Bellis make the first coil or two, and then, a little anxiously it seemed to Mr. Bellis, said: "You are very expert, sir. You have done this before!"

"Yes," Mr. Bellis modestly replied; "once or twice." He continued to rope the conjuror until he had him thoroughly trussed. All his professional camaraderie had gone now. Dog did not eat dog, and colleague did not give colleague away. Mr. Bellis acknowledged all that, nor would he ever to himself have admitted that in his heart there was a wild desire to do Diabolo down, or that he was engaged in trussing him up so that he could not escape from his bonds.

"And if he gets loose from that," he said to himself a little viciously, as he tied the last knot, "I'll take off my hat to him and give up conjuring!"

Diabolo winced as Mr. Bellis pulled the final knot fast. "It is very tight," he said, with just a touch of complaint in his tone.

"It is," Mr. Bellis replied. "As tight as I can pull it!"

"Looks a bit upset," he added under his breath. "I think I've done Mr. Diabolo."

The conjuror tried to shake himself inside his bonds, but failed to make any impression on them.

"This gentleman has tied me tighter than I've ever been tied before," he said to the audience, smiling wanly as he did so. Mr. Bellis smirked. He had added a thrill to the entertainment, and was about, he told himself, to add a greater thrill to it. Mr. Diabolo would presently receive the shock of his life! . . .

But Diabolo was speaking. Mr. Bellis must listen, must not miss a word.

"There are two very large cases at the back of the stage," he said. "Perhaps these gentlemen will kindly carry them both to the front of the stage."

Mr. Bellis, who had already noted the properties, helped the other men to bring them close to the footlights. They resembled very tall coffins.

"I will ask the gentlemen to examine the cases . . ." Diabolo began, but he did not complete his speech, for Mr. Bellis was causing laughter in the audience by the thoroughness with which he was already examining them. He stepped inside them, rapping on the walls and feeling for false bottoms and secret hinges, but, to his disappointment, could find none.

"Satisfied?" Diabolo enquired, as Mr. Bellis stepped out of the second case.

"Quite!" Mr. Bellis replied.

"Well, then," Diabolo continued, "I will ask the gentleman to place me inside one of the cases—whichever he likes—and I will then ask him to step into the other himself."

Mr. Bellis gave a little start. This was what he called sauce! Cheek and impudence!

"Very well, Mr. Diabolo," he grimly said to himself, "if you *will* put your head into the lion's mouth! . . ."

He and the other men carried the seemingly helpless Diabolo to the first of the two cases and propped him up inside it. He looked extraordinarily like a mummy.

"You're for it, my lad!" Mr. Bellis thought.

Then he went and stood inside the second case.

Diabolo instructed the other men to draw a light curtain across the opening of each case, which was done. Mr. Bellis, standing in his case, heard the voice of Diabolo calling to him, "Are you there?"

"Yes," he replied, in a loud, clear voice.

"Then come here," Diabolo said. And suddenly it seemed to Mr. Bellis that the case was full of the strange smell. . . . He felt that he was being suffocated. Anger filled him. Diabolo had probably been told by the manager that George Butt Bellis was in the audience and was playing a dirty trick on him. "Damned dirty!" he thought, and then the smell suddenly ceased to offend his nostrils. He heard a shout. It came from Diabolo, *but it came now from the left of Mr. Bellis and not from the right.* Mr. Bellis tried to move, but found that he could not do so. Then the curtain was pulled aside, and Diabolo, free from his bonds, stood before him, while Mr. Bellis, glancing down, saw that all of them, rope, manacles and handcuffs, were on himself!

"Goo' Gaw!" he said aloud.

As he was lifted out of the case he received a second surprise, for the case from which he was lifted was the case in which he had helped to put Diabolo!

IV

He went up to the manager when the performance was over. "Look here," he said, "I want you to take me behind and introduce me to this chap Diabolo. I suppose you told him I was in the audience?"

"No, I didn't," the manager replied.

"Liar!" Mr. Bellis muttered to himself.

"As a matter of fact," the manager continued, "I didn't see him after his show last night, and I haven't seen him all day."

"Well, take me behind. I'd like to have a chat with him."

The manager led Mr. Bellis through the iron pass-door which connected the stage with the auditorium, and up some stone stairs to the dressing-rooms. Outside one, on which there was a card marked "Diabolo," he stopped and knocked. Diabolo's voice called "Come in!" and the manager opened the door. Funny, he thought, how that smell pervaded the theatre. Diabolo was alone in the dressing-room.

"This is Mr. George Butt Bellis, Mr. Diabolo," the manager said. "The great Bellis, I may say. You've heard of him, of course?"

"Come in, Mr. Bellis," Diabolo said, smiling at the conjuror. "Ah," he continued, when he saw who Mr. Bellis was, "you were kind enough to help me at my little performance!"

"Yes," Mr. Bellis replied. "As a matter of fact, that's what I've come to talk to you about."

The manager interrupted. "If you'll excuse me, gentlemen," he said. "Lot to do. . . ."

"Certainly, certainly!" they both exclaimed. Mr. Bellis, indeed, was glad to see the manager go. He did not wish to have him butting in.

"And now, Mr. Bellis?" Diabolo said, when the door had closed behind the manager.

"Well, I've come to make you an offer," Mr. Bellis said. "I don't know how far you've committed yourself! . . ."

"I've not committed myself at all," Diabolo replied.

"I'm very glad to hear that!" Mr. Bellis very heartily retorted.

"I committed myself once," Diabolo continued, a little sadly; "but never again!"

"Quite right! Quite right!" said Mr. Bellis. "Once bit, twice shy, as the old adage has it. Well, I'll be brief and blunt. I want you to come into partnership with me. I've got a bit of capital—I don't suppose you've got any. . . ."

Diabolo smiled.

"Well, that doesn't matter. I've got enough for two. We'll open a Hall of Magic in London, and between us we'll knock old Maskelyne and Devant silly. I'm a pretty good conjuror, as I daresay you know. . . ."

Diabolo spread his hands, as who should say, "Of course! Of course!"

"And you've got the goods, too! Don't decide now. Take a night to think it over. I'm staying at the Can-

telupe Hotel. Come to lunch with me there to-morrow. One o'clock. Food's awful, but it's the best in the place."

Diabolo did not reply.

"And, look here, old chap, now that we're partners, so to speak, just tell me how you did that trick with me. Dam' good, it was! I can't quite see *how* you did it. Of course, I know the general idea, of course, but just how did you do it?"

Diabolo smiled, but did not answer.

"Well, perhaps you're right," Mr. Bellis went on. "I'd no right to ask you to give it away. I don't mind telling you you gave me a turn. I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw I had changed places with you. Of course, it was a trick—and a dam' good trick, too!—but—you'll laugh when I tell you this—I have to laugh myself when I think of it—I thought at first there was a bit of supernatural hanky-panky about it. It didn't seem humanly possible to do that trick."

Mr. Bellis laughed very heartily at the recollection of his thought. Then he caught sight of Diabolo's big, dark, gloomy eyes, and, as he did so, his laughter ceased. His nostrils were full of the strange smell. He suddenly stood up, staring at the figure before him.

"No," Diabolo said; "it *isn't* humanly possible!"

"Goo' Gaw!" Mr. Bellis muttered, making for the door.

CLUTIE JOHN

His name was John, and he was left-handed, so he was called Clutie John. If you had guessed for a hundred years and more you would not have guessed what his occupation was. Looking at him, you might have thought that he was an agricultural labourer or a bricklayer, or any of the class of workers who are continually employed in the open, for his face had the ruddy, roughened aspect of one who is frequently beaten by wind and rain and warmed by the sun. His habits, too, would have confirmed you in your belief that he was an agricultural labourer, for he rose and retired early, and his life was conducted with the regularity that belong not to clockwork (for which he had a mighty contempt), as men assert, but to great natural things. Watches, and all timepieces, of whatsoever kind, were totally disregarded by him. They were vain human contrivances, no two of which could be trusted to say the same thing. The sun was his guide and counsellor: when it rose, he rose; when it set, he went to bed; it never deceived him; it needed no regulating, it went neither slow nor fast, and it never ran down.

"Fin'in' things" was Clutie John's occupation. Do not misunderstand; he was not a policeman or a private inquiry agent or anything remotely resembling either one or the other. He would not have spied for

you had you offered him any sum you can imagine as a proper reward for such service. He was a clean man and believed in minding his own business and leaving other people to mind theirs. He did not regard the offer of money as an excuse for the performance of work which was detestable. "Ye shud do a thing," he would say, "acause ye like doin' it, not acause ye're paid t' do it! If ye wudden do a thing fur nathin' if ye cud, ye shudden do it fur pay," which was an admirable aphorism on which, strange as it may seem, he constantly acted.

His occupation literally was that of a finder of things. He went out in the morning before other men were astir, with a bag slung over his shoulders and a pointed stick in his hand, seeking what he could find. The debris of the previous night's gathering of men and women in the street was not all rubbish; there were all sorts of trifles carelessly dropped by the people which, when picked up by Clutie John, could be turned into profit. Not all the things found were trifles; some, indeed, were of great value. There was a packet of jewellery that he found once, the reward for which was considerable. Mostly, however, his finds were trifling in themselves. Here a sixpence, there a penny or a halfpenny, a glove, a purse (sometimes empty, sometimes not), pencils, pens, marbles, umbrellas, and what not. These things, discreetly disposed of, were the source of Clutie John's small, but regular, income.

"People is very forgetful," he would say, with a little reproach in his tone; and then, as if to make up for the reproach, he would add: "Och, well, sure they've

a dale to think about, what wi' wan thing an' another, an' if they wurn't a bit forgetful, it wudden be much o' a living I'd be makin'."

He was a great friend of all the small boys in the district. This was partly in the way of business, for he sold his "marleys" to them. "Boys is more forgetful nor anyone," he would say, while he pulled a number of marbles out of his pockets. "Girls is no good til me. They never furget nathin' but hairpins, an' they're har'ly worth pickin' up. Wee girls furgets nathin' at all. A wud die o' starvation if there wus nathin' but wee girls in the wurl." He would pause for a moment, and then add merrily: "They're the quare wee tories, wee girls!" which is the Irish way of saying that little girls are pleasant little rascals. Whenever a boy met Clutie John he would cry out to him familiarly, "Ha, Clutie John!" and Clutie John would gravely reply, "Ha, wee lad!"

"Have ye anny marleys the day?" the boy would say.

"Ay, A have a brave wee lot!" Clutie John would reply.

"How many will ye give us fur a ha'penny?" and Clutie John would offer to give two or three more for a ha'penny than were given in the shops.

"It dussen matter whether A give them too manny or not," he would say, by way of excuse for his lavishness. "Sure, they'll loss them soon enough, an' A'll mebbe fin' them, an' sell them back to them again. Wee lads is the quare lossers!"

It was in this manner that Clutie John made his living. Whatever happened in the world made little

difference to him, except in so far as it increased his opportunities for finding things. Public holidays, all joyful occasions, were strongly supported by him. On the morning after such days he found much that was good, with less difficulty than usual. "They hing the-gither, a crowd," he would say, "an' ye fin' near all ye want wi'out shiftin' about much. They're that happy, they furget more aisily nor when they're just ordinary!" Monday morning found him making for the lovers' Sunday haunts. "Coortin' couples is very furgetful," he would say. "A make more out o' them nor A do out o' anny one else, except mebbe the wee lads. Bits o' lace hankeys an' things that weemen likes t' have about them of a Sunday."

He always spoke of his fellows as if they were a different species of being altogether from himself. They were all "furgetful," and Clutie John never forgot anything. That in itself was sufficient to mark him out from them; but his habits of life made it difficult for him to have much intercourse of a familiar character with any particular person. He knew, and was known by, many; but of all the persons whom he knew, none could call him friend. The "wee lads" would hold his hand and endeavour to wheedle "marleys" out of him when they were penniless, and he would send them away quite happy, although they had not succeeded in getting a single "marley" from him. Clutie John never gave anything away. Secreted in his mind was a dreadful fear that a day might come, and that quickly, when he would not be able to go out in the morning and find things, and all his life was a great effort to prepare

for that time. He lived alone, and cooked his own meals; he never went to a theatre or music-hall, or a church; in a queer odd way of his own he was religious, but precisely what he believed no one knew.

He was easily moved by natural beauty; he would sniff the fresh morning air, not for reasons of health (for he hated open windows), but for the sheer joy of feeling it in his lungs; and the sun rising from behind the hills and casting its first chilly rays on the river always made him stand still for a while and whistle. There were no great joys in his life and no great sorrows, his progress through the world was smooth and unexhilarating, nothing disturbed his equanimity; an unusually large find of "marleys" excited him as little as an unusually small find, outwardly at all events, for no doubt the secret fear lurking in his mind made such things of great moment to him; but on the surface of his life he showed as a simple, serene, almost passionless man, for whom such things as joys and griefs did not exist.

When he died, as he did suddenly, he left a considerable sum of money. It passed into the hands of the State, for he had no kin and had made no will. It was odd to think of him scraping and saving, not in the least like the conventional miser, and at the end all that he had scraped together passing from him to the community, through whose "forgetfulness" he had made his small fortune.

OLD MRS. CLIFFORD

I

PEOPLE frequently wondered what Mrs. Clifford would do if by some misfortune her husband should die before her. Every morning he came down the hill to the village, visiting the butcher, the baker, and occasionally the chemist. "So kind a man," people said. "He does all the shopping and saves his poor wife the trouble. He considers her in everything. Of course," they added, "she has been an invalid for years."

The explanation was made in terms of excuse. It was as if Mrs. Clifford had been guilty of neglect, unhousewifely impropriety, that was barely excused by her illness. Some people hinted that she took advantage of her husband's solicitude, and lolled about on sofas more than was necessary. But Mr. Clifford did not complain. When one invited him to tea, and added, "Won't you bring Mrs. Clifford?" he tenderly replied, "I should like her to come, but my dear wife never goes out. You know she is very delicate." So he always came to tea by himself.

He was a busy man, almost a fussy man, with a feeling that was near to a contempt for the generation growing around him. They had no respect: they were

pert; they did not understand the value of tradition; they did not defer to their elders. He was as broad-minded as anybody, quite a Radical, but he could not close his eyes to an increasing insolence discernible in working people. The men in the village omitted to raise their hats to the ladies on the hill; they always omitted to touch their hats to him. Personally, he disliked the poor, and refused to read about them. He disliked novels about peasants or poor people, and could not abide Thomas Hardy because he nearly always wrote about *that* class of person. He thought the poor were pampered by modern legislators. Great nonsense was talked about the poor. The poor were poor because they ought to be poor. What did I think?

He did not wait to hear what I thought. I noticed that Mr. Clifford never did wait to hear what anyone thought. He would plant himself in a chair, leaning his elbows on its arms, and lie back with his fingers touching each other, and smile and say, "Now I want to have a good talk with you. Just tell me *all* you think." But before a reply could be made, he was off on some grievance against the community or the Government or the village, and when he had finished it was time for him to go home. His dear wife would be getting anxious. "You see," he always ended, "she is a great invalid. She never goes out, she never sees anybody. Visitors are too much for her, and she gets anxious if I stay away from her very long."

"An ideal husband," the village said. "So thoughtful, and so devoted!"

It seemed that he talked a great deal to Mrs. Clifford.

He told her the more unsensational items of news, for the newspapers were agitating things for a delicate woman to read for herself. About nine o'clock, or soon afterwards, he would remind her that she had had a tiring day, and would send her to bed. They did not play cards in the evening. Mr. Clifford disliked cards; he thought that they were a great waste of time; very foolish things. Someone suggested to him that the wireless would be a great blessing to Mrs. Clifford, but he shook his head decisively. His dear wife was too easily upset, and who knew what disturbance might come into her life through this dreadful invention?

When Mr. Montgomery bought his new motor-car, he thought to himself that it would be a kindly and neighbourly act to invite poor Mrs. Clifford for a drive across the Common on the first warm day; but Mr. Clifford was emphatic in his assertion that such a thing would be the death of her. But if at any time Mr. Montgomery should be driving across the Common and would like to take Mr. Clifford with him, Mr. Clifford would gladly go. It was kind of Mr. Montgomery to think of Mrs. Clifford in this way, and she would certainly be told of his generous offer, but she never went anywhere. She was too delicate.

And the village, when it observed with what care and consideration Mr. Clifford surrounded his wife, repeatedly wondered to itself what poor Mrs. Clifford would do if she were left alone.

"It is a comfort," it said, "to think that she will probably die before he does," for a haler and more

hearty old gentleman than Mr. Clifford there seemed not to be in the entire county. What activity he had! How busily he went from place to place! How persistent he was in getting his way! Some of the shopkeepers spoke slightingly of him, but one knows what small shopkeepers are like! The butcher was almost offensive about Mr. Clifford. "Comes down 'ere," he said, "and buys three-penn'orth of bones to make gravy, but gets his meat sent down from the Stores in London!" Some of the villagers said that he was not generous. He rarely contributed to local societies. When the treasurer of the Horticultural Society asked him to subscribe to its funds he read the treasurer a little lecture on the need for sturdy independence and self-reliance. Why should the villagers expect the people on the hill to provide prize money for their unique potatoes and immense cabbages and pretty flowers, when they were perfectly capable of providing their own prizes? There was a great lack of proper pride in England nowadays! . . . There had been some difficulty in the past about a right of way which Mr. Clifford had closed. Obstinate and pugnacious villagers had torn down a fence, and had threatened to do violence to Mr. Clifford himself; but the law had upheld him, and the villagers were warned that an example would be made of any man who offered offence or violence to this worthy gentleman, who had provided another path for them as convenient as the one he had closed, and, in the judgment of many, much more convenient. The villagers, being for the most part inexpert in argument, remained mute in the

presence of the magistrates, but they were extraordinarily eloquent in the Horse and Hounds that night! . . .

Still, though they declined to touch their hats to Mr. Clifford, and said that he was stingy, even they were obliged to admit that his devotion to Mrs. Clifford was beautiful, and they, like their betters on the hill, often wondered what poor Mrs. Clifford would do if he should die before her.

II

Suddenly, while he still seemed strong and active and likely to last for a long time, Mr. Clifford died. There was consternation in the village. Instantly all minds were full of thoughts about Mrs. Clifford. The poor lady, lying ill on her sofa, scarcely able to move from her pretty drawing-room to her pretty garden, bereft so cruelly of her support and comfort! People who had not seen her—and there were many people in the village who had never seen Mrs. Clifford—had been told of the way in which her husband would support her on his arm as he led her to the sunniest spot in the garden and placed her very carefully on a cushioned chair. She would sit in the sunlight, if it were not too strong, and look through the trees at the sea. At the end of an hour Mr. Clifford would bring her back to the drawing-room and make her lie down on the sofa and rest. Such devotion was so rare in these times, so old-fashioned and picturesque! One felt kindlier about humanity when one remembered that a husband so solicitous was alive. And this

poor lady, comforted and sustained by that tender old man, had now to live without him! How bleak the rest of her time would be! Everything in her house would remind her of him. The easy chair near the fire, where he sat and told her the news; the old coat, to which he was so attached; the slippers he wore in the evening, though they were very shabby—all these would remind her of him. In the afternoon on sunny days she would look longingly round the room as if she were expecting him to support her to her shady seat, but he would not be there, and she would be afraid to venture to the garden by herself, lest weakness should overcome her on the way.

The vicar's wife hurried to confer with the doctor's wife. "Ought not something to be done?" Poor Mrs. Clifford would probably die from shock if she did not die through sheer inability to live without her husband.

The old lady's grief was profound. The vicar had had to admit that his eyes were wet when he saw how deeply the dear lady mourned over her dead. She could not be comforted. Despite the appeals of her friends, she had insisted on going to the graveyard, but she yielded to their entreaties and went in a carriage, though the distance was short, and took care to wrap herself very warmly, though the day was not cold. Her sad, white face had stirred the hearts of all who beheld her. How lined her face was! That was illness. The sympathetic spectators could see the marks of suffering in her countenance. The dim, grey, unlit eyes seemed full of sorrow that was of a longer

duration than her husband's death. With difficulty they looked at her overflowing eyes as the vicar threw earth on the coffin and murmured, "Ashes to ashes! . . ."

"She has had a lot of trouble, that woman," the villagers declared, and even the butcher, when he looked at her and remembered the harsh, unkindly words he had spoken about the dead man, felt ashamed.

"It won't be long before she follows him there," he murmured, when the body was buried and the mourners had gone away; and all those who heard him felt assured that he spoke the truth.

III

It seemed so to Mrs. Clifford herself. This terrible blow had never been anticipated by her. Whenever she had thought of death, she had thought of it as coming first for her. Sitting now in her drawing-room, with the lamp unlit and the dusk of evening closing around her, she wondered why it was that never once in her life had she thought of herself as a widow. Even when she was a young girl, and newly married, she had always imagined that she would die before Henry. How frightened she had been when her baby was coming . . . the only baby she was ever to have . . . and the thought assailed her that she might not live to rear it! But it was the baby that died. That, too, was something she had never anticipated. How odd that all the things she had intuitively regarded as

settled should be unsettled, that at this moment Henry should be lying in his grave, while she remained alive! . . .

What was she to do?

She looked round the drawing-room and wondered whether she would have the energy to ring for light. Mary, her maid, would be busy in the house now, and it would be unkind to call her from her work merely to light the lamp. If Henry . . . But Henry would never be at hand again to perform these little services for her. She lay back on the sofa and closed her eyes. Every evening would be like this until she, too, died. She would sit in this room by herself, with no one to speak to, no one to tell her the news, no one to support her to the garden, for of course she could not call Mary every time she wanted to go and see the grass and the flowers and catch a glimpse of the sea through the pine-trees. She would just lie on this sofa, old and lonely and sorrowful, and wither away.

If only Henry had been willing to have the electric light installed in the house, this bothersome business of lamps would not now be filling her mind with anxiety. How obstinate he had been about the electric light! She had wished him to have the house "wired," but he would not listen to her pleas, nor would he acknowledge the convenience of electric light. When she had said that oil-lamps were clumsy and dirty, and had a horrid smell, he reminded her that it was Mary's duty to fill and clean and light them, that that, in fact, was part of the work for which Mary was paid. Why

should she worry herself about a little thing like that? Her kindly nature, of course, made her over-solicitous for her servants, but she must believe him that there was a great deal too much of this pampering of working people. No, there would not be any electric light in the house. The lamps would continue to be used! . . . She yielded to Henry then, for he was very astute and generally right about everything. Probably she *was* too willing to make things easy for the servants, and no doubt that was wrong. There was an old saying of which Henry often reminded her, that the more you did for servants the less they were willing to do for you. She thought it was very clever of him to discover that servants despised people who were considerate to them. "They think you are weak," Henry had said, "unless you treat them with strictness."

Still, lying on the sofa in the dusk, it seemed to her that if he had allowed the electric light to be brought into the house, this trouble that was now agitating her mind would not be any trouble at all. She would not have to ring for Mary. All she would have to do would be to cross the room, turn down the switch, and instantly there would be light.

She wondered how much it would cost to have electric light put in. Henry had been very severe on tradesmen and workmen. Everything was very different nowadays; the expense of living was terrible. Workmen expected high wages, even when they were dawdling, and according to Henry they never did anything else but dawdle. Tradesmen were uncon-

scionable, and seemed not to realize that people like him were not as well off as they had been before the war! . . . Things *were* expensive; but now that she was a widow the cost of maintaining the house would be less than it had been when Henry was alive, and perhaps if she were careful she could afford to ask the electrician from the neighbouring town to "wire" the house for electricity.

While this speculation ran through her mind, the door opened, and Mary, carrying a lamp, came in. She placed it on the table, and came to the sofa and straightened Mrs. Clifford's pillow. "You look tired, ma'am," she said.

"I *am* tired, Mary," Mrs. Clifford replied.

"Would you like to go to bed now?"

"No, thank you, Mary."

"Is there anything you want?"

Mrs. Clifford considered. What did she want? What did she *not* want? She wanted Henry again. She wanted Henry to come into the room, and sit there by the fire and tell her all that he had been doing in the village; and what clever things he had said to the vicar, and how incapable of replying the vicar had been; and how he had utterly confounded the doctor on some question of medicine, and how the doctor had said, "Clifford, you ought to have been a doctor yourself."

She felt her eyes fill with tears, and she turned her head so that Mary should not see them. She remained like that for a few moments, not speaking, unaware almost that Mary was still in the room. Nor did she

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move or speak until she heard Mary say: "Would you like me to bring you the paper, ma'am?"

She turned her head again, and looked at the girl. Bring her the paper! She had not read a newspaper for years. Henry had always selected passages to read to her, and she had enjoyed lying back on the sofa while she listened to his rather agreeable voice. And yet why should she not read the paper? Henry could not read it to her any more, and she could not go through the rest of her life not knowing anything of what was happening in the world.

She nodded her head. "Thank you, Mary," she said.

She fingered it carelessly, and wondered to herself how the editor could find so much that was interesting and strange to print every day. She wondered whether there were awful evenings when there was not enough news to print, and what the editor did on such occasions. Did he take paragraphs out of back numbers and reprint them? Or perhaps he gave a longer instalment of the serial story. A new serial was beginning in this very paper that very day, and she was obliged to admit, after reading the first chapter, that she found it interesting . . . so interesting, indeed, that she read the remainder of the instalment, and found herself looking forward to the next. There seemed to be a great deal of news in the paper. Henry had always had difficulty in finding anything to read to her. He would say, "There is nothing interesting in the paper to-day," and then, after reading a paragraph or two aloud to her, he would relapse into silence and read the rest

to himself. Once or twice, indeed, she had wondered why it was that although there was so little in the paper that was worth reading to her, there was so much in it that was worth reading to himself. But she had not allowed these thoughts, that were almost disloyal to Henry, to occupy her mind too much. She had contracted the habit of closing her eyes while Henry foraged for information! . . . Now, indeed, thinking of those days, she seemed to herself to have spent a great deal of time with her eyes closed, not sleeping, not even dozing, but just resting. Henry had always been very insistent on the need she had for rest. Henry was so kind, and so considerate. Still, she would like to have heard more of the news, and she was glad that Mary had suggested bringing the paper to her. There was a great deal of useful information in it, on all sorts of subjects, and she was very astonished, therefore, when, having finished the instalment of the serial story and the interesting items of news and information, she found Mary back in the room telling her that it was long after her accustomed hour of retirement. It was ten o'clock! Yet she did not feel tired. If Mary had delayed coming for another hour, she felt that she would feel no more tired than she did now.

"Mary," she said, "do you think it would cost much to have the electric light put in?"

Mary considered. "I don't think so, ma'am," she replied.

"I was just wondering," Mrs. Clifford continued,

"whether it would not be nice to have it. So much more convenient than oil-lamps!"

"Indeed, it is, ma'am," Mary eagerly answered. "Higgins at Port Town could let you have an estimate. Shall I ask him?"

"No," Mrs. Clifford replied. "No, I don't think so. I would like to think about it. Give me your arm, Mary."

Mary supported her to the stairs, and up to her room. "Perhaps you might ask Higgins to let me have an estimate," she said, as she sat down at her dressing-table. "After all, it commits me to nothing."

"No, ma'am," said Mary. "You can always refuse to have it."

"Yes. Well, you can go into Port Town to-morrow morning, and ask Mr. Higgins to come and see me."

And then, with a strange sense of having done something forbidden, she went to bed.

IV

Mr. Higgins had been a little overpowering. It seemed to Mrs. Clifford that he had taken possession of her house. He listened to her, but quite clearly he had not the slightest intention of heeding her. He had come there to "wire" the house, and he was resolved that he would not quit it until he had "wired" it. Once or twice Mrs. Clifford had had qualms. Henry would have disapproved, not only of the introduction of electricity into his house—for he never said "our" house—but would certainly have found fault with Mr. Higgins, a large, coarse man, a red-faced man,

who laughed a good deal and very noisily, especially when he had just made a little joke of his own. His hands were big and fat and his fingers were dreadfully thick, and his nails were in deep mourning. She choked a little when she thought that—it seemed bad taste to her—but she excused the jest by reminding herself that it was Henry's favourite. No, Henry would not have approved of Mr. Higgins, but Mrs. Clifford acknowledged to herself that there were times when he really was very amusing. In any case, he had "wired" the house quite quickly, and had departed with assurances of esteem for her and his deep desire to be of service to her at any time she might need him. His bill, too, had been a fair one.

But apart from all that, there was the undoubted advantage of the electric light. Mary was quite overjoyed with it. She could scarcely restrain her delight and her wonder. No nasty, smelling oil to be poured into a lamp, no wick to be trimmed, no globe to be cleaned, no tremors while the lamp was carried to the drawing-room lest she should fall and set herself on fire, no fear of an explosion! One simply pulled down a little switch, and the room was lit. Mrs. Clifford could not help thinking that Henry had been naughtily obstinate, although there was a lot in what he used so often to say: "What would servants do if life were made so convenient for them that there was practically no work? These labour-saving devices would leave servants and common people with too much leisure. What would they do with it?" He would remark on the habits of the fishermen during gales, when they

were sometimes unable to go to sea for several days. What did they do? They stood about in the village street, just talking, or went into the Horse and Hounds and took too much drink, or lay in bed and slept. Not one of them ever thought of improving his mind. "Work," said Henry, "was invented to keep common people occupied, and the world was raising a very great problem for itself in the future by its foolish invention of ways to reduce the labour of people who had no minds to use, or were unwilling to use them if they had."

On the other hand, it was very comforting for Mrs. Clifford to feel that she was not so dependent on other people now as she had been in the past. Mr. Higgins had actually arranged a little switch by her bedside, so that she could light the room in a moment, without leaving her bed. The comfort of it! All the old fumbling with matches and candles was over and done with. She could remember how, in the night, when she had not felt very well, she had borne her illness without complaint because she did not wish to disturb Henry, who insisted on keeping the candle and the matches on his side of the bed. All that was over. The night had fewer fears for her. And all because of a little switch!

She had become accustomed now to reading the newspaper for herself. She no longer waited for someone to come and choose passages for her. Mr. Higgins had told her that she ought to have a wireless set in the house: he had one, and he was full of information about the pleasure he got from it. Every evening, it

seemed, a gentleman in London broadcast the news of the day, and there were concerts and lectures and all sorts of interesting things. Mr. Higgins set his clock every evening by Big Ben. "'E's my timekeeper, 'e is!" said Mr. Higgins, very amusingly. That reminded her that it was a long time since she had been in London; almost she had forgotten what Big Ben looked like. Well, of course, the wireless was an innovation, and she was quite sure that Henry would never have consented to have it in the house; but it sounded very attractive, and when she glanced through the programmes printed in the newspapers, it seemed to her that one got a great deal for one's money. She must think about it!

She was astonished to find how easy it was to go into the garden by herself. At first she had been a little timid, and had held on to furniture and the walls as she steered herself from the room, and she had used a stick. But one morning she could not find the stick, and, amazingly, she was able to dispense with it.

How beautiful it was to sit in the garden and watch the sunlight making patterns on the grass and leaves! And how tempting it was to walk along the little path right to the very end of the garden, and look over the hedge at the sea. By leaning against one of the trees and standing on tiptoes she could just see the beach, where the fishermen landed their fish. She could barely remember the last time she had been down there, and she thought to herself that she would like to go again, but of course that was impossible.

She would have to go all the way back to the house, and put on her cloak and hat, and then climb the ascending path to the gate, and go down that steep hill into the village, along the village street to the slope that led down to the shingle, and then across the shingle itself. The idea was wild: a woman so delicate as she was could not possibly do such things! . . .

And yet it was very alluring, that thought, and the fishermen were such nice men, although some of them had been very rude to Henry about the right of way. Perhaps she could walk up to the front gate. The path certainly was steep and a little slippery, because Henry had said there was no need to buy new gravel, since it was so little used; but if she were careful no doubt she could walk up to it without injury.

She turned, and looked back to the house where she had lived so long, from which she had so seldom emerged, and suddenly it seemed to her that she had been a prisoner. This tiny plot of garden was almost unknown territory. She had passed from her bedroom to her drawing-room, and from her drawing-room to the wicker chair on the little balcony, and then back again from the wicker chair to the drawing-room, and from the drawing-room to her bedroom, and that was all! Such a tiny piece of the world was hers!

There came into her mind the wicked thought that it would not matter if she died in going down to the beach. How long had she to live? She was an old woman, and perhaps with great care she could live a

year or two longer. All her friends seemed to imagine that life for her must now be very short, since she had lost Henry. Well, what was the good of all this care and protection, merely to gain a year or two more of dull life. Much better to take her chance and go down to the village, and see the beach, and get the little pleasure that she could! She shuddered at the dreadful thought, for it sounded to her almost as if she were proposing to take her own life. But the thought would not leave her mind: it insisted on being considered. What was the sense of leading this hot-water-bottled life? . . . She found herself half-way up the steep path to the gate almost before she knew that she was going there, and when at last she reached the gate and stood with her hand on the latch, her heart beat so quickly that she feared she would shortly die. But in a little while her heart became quieter, and she opened the gate and looked out on the road. There was the hill leading down to the village, and while she looked a little boy came out of one of the cottages. It shocked her that that boy had been born and had grown up without her ever having seen him before. Such a pretty little boy! She watched him as he played about in the sunshine, and felt herself full of envy because of his youth and his happiness and his vigour. Whose child could he be? It worried her to think that she could not remember the names of the people who lived down there. There was a time when she had known the name of everybody in the village, but that was so long ago.

Would it be bad for her if she were to walk down

the hill, very carefully, holding on to the wall, and speak to that little boy? . . . She put her hand on the wall and moved a step or two from the gate. That was all right! She moved another step or two, still holding on to the wall, and that was all right too. Presently she was at the foot of the hill and talking to the child, who glanced at her shyly and could not be induced to answer her questions. Suddenly he ran away, too embarrassed to remain in her company.

She looked about her. The village seemed very much as it had been long ago, except that there was a War Memorial outside the church. She had never seen the War Memorial . . . and she had a desire to go close up to it and read the names of all those dear young men who had gone away from the village and had never come back again; but she remembered that she had no hat on. She was walking about just like a village woman . . . really she ought not to do things like that! Still, she was in the village now, and there was the Memorial! . . .

It was while she was reading the names carved at the foot of the Memorial Cross, and examining the cards attached to the wreaths, that the doctor came upon her. He could not believe his eyes. "Good Lord!" he said. "You!"

She gave a little nervous laugh, and with difficulty explained her presence.

"Well, well, well!" he said. "Wonders will never cease! You had better jump in here"—pointing to his car—"and I will drive you up the hill. You know,"

he added, "these *are* goings-on! At your time of life, trapesing round the village without a hat!" She thought that was very funny, and laughed as she entered the car. But she was a little frightened, for motor-cars were wild, plunging, uneasy things, of which Henry had disapproved, and she knew that the doctor had a reputation for driving almost furiously. She hoped that he would deliver her whole and sound at her door, but she could not help feeling a little dismay when suddenly the car plunged forward. But it was rather nice to move so quickly and to feel the air blowing past! . . . She arrived at her gate without mishap. The doctor made more jokes about her "goings-on," and then left her. . . .

She closed the gate, and descended the path to the house, and entered her drawing-room and sat down. She was quite thrilled and excited, but not a bit tired. Odd, that! Very odd! And how incredible it was that she should have done all she had done that afternoon, and still be alive!

V

On the next afternoon, and on the next, she ventured out again. There was a little lane on the other side of the road from her front gate, which led up to high fields in which sheep and lambs grazed. She had an odd desire to go to one of these fields, and lean over the fence and fondle the young sheep. Her mourning garments made her look sombre in the sunlit lane, and she was conscious of some incongruity between her old black figure and the new life about her. The hedges were full of new leaves and spring

flowers. The primroses had nearly gone, but the foxgloves were shooting up in great masses, and bees were busy in their big bells. There was a seat half-way to the top of the lane, where she could rest, and she liked to think that someone who was considerate to old ladies had placed it there. What a number of kind people there were in the world! . . .

Coming away from the lane one afternoon, she met Mr. Montgomery in his motor-car, and he stopped to talk to her. Mr. Montgomery was one of those unaccountable, impulsive men, and quite suddenly and without relevance to anything that he or she had been saying, he said to her: "Get in, won't you? I'm going across the Common to Bovey Hayne, and we will have tea there!"

Such an impulsive thing to say! No arrangement, no plan, no thinking the thing over, a mere whim, unthoughtfully gratified! . . . But she accepted his invitation, and afterwards was bound to say she had greatly enjoyed the nice tea he had given her in the new hotel. Quite a lot of people seemed to be living in it, some of them even older than herself, and they were very bright and talkative. One old lady clattered and laughed a good deal over her tea. It seemed she had been out in a boat that morning . . . at her age! Still, she seemed very pleased with herself, and all the people to whom she was talking seemed pleased with her, too. Why should the old lady not go out in a boat? Mrs. Clifford could barely remember the last time when *she* had been in one. Henry had not cared for the sea, especially after his trouble about the

right of way. Not, of course, that she had any intention of going out in a boat, but there did not seem to be any real reason why an old lady should not be taken for a row in one.

It was Mr. Montgomery who had filled her head with ideas about cards. He was sure she must feel lonely in the afternoons, and he suggested that she should come some time to his house and play bridge with his wife and his sister and him.

"But I don't know how to play bridge!" she protested.

"We'll teach you," he replied.

A horrid fear assailed her. "Do you play for money?" she asked.

"We won't if you would rather not," he said.

That made her feel mean. "Oh, I don't mind if it isn't too much," she said.

And so she had agreed to go to the Montgomerys and play bridge for money! She became expert at it. Mr. Montgomery teased her, and said, "You have all the instincts of a card-sharper." That made her laugh. It pleased her to think that she could win. The doctor's wife, when she heard about her visits to the Montgomerys, insisted that she should come and play cards with her, and one afternoon she was whirled all the way to Bovey Hayne to play bridge in the hotel. She could not imagine what Henry would think if he were alive.

There came a day when she herself had two tables of bridge in her own house. Mary had been very excited that afternoon. Mary, it seemed, liked parties.

She would work quite hard to prepare for a party, thought she was a little slack about her work on other occasions.

"A party does us all good," said Mary. "Livens us up!"

It was for Mary's sake that the wireless was installed in the house. The doctor's wife had said that the servants were reconciled to living in the country by the wireless, and really, when you had the wireless in the kitchen, you might as well have it in the drawing-room. Every night at nine o'clock Mrs. Clifford listened to Big Ben. As the heavy, sombre notes tolled into her room, she wished that she were able to go again to London. People told her that it had greatly changed; they said that she would not recognize Regent Street if she saw it. The Strand had been almost completely rebuilt. Piccadilly was changing. The traffic was tremendous, and would frighten her! . . . It was better, she thought, for an old lady to stay quietly in the country.

But when she received an invitation to the wedding of a great-niece, she resolved to accept it, although no one had expected her to do so.

Her heart trembled as she drove to the station to catch the train for London, and she appealed to the guard to take care of her. In London the traffic frightened her, and she was very glad when at last she reached her destination. This noisy, incoherent town, so different from the London she had known as a girl, was not a fit place for old people, although when she looked out of the windows she saw many

old people about. She would gladly go home. Yet there was something agreeable in being there again! . . .

That visit to London had been very thrilling. The wedding had made her cry happy tears, and the reception had given her great joy, because so many people whom she had not seen for years came and spoke to her, and told her how well she looked. Everyone said she looked well. In the evening, after the bride and bridegroom had left for Italy, she had been taken to a theatre to see a musical comedy, which was very gay and very cheerful, and of course very silly. How Henry had hated musical comedy, and what very severe things he had said about public taste! But she had enjoyed it. Such bright, happy young people, so much colour and light, such gaiety and fun!

Two days later she returned to her home. As the hired carriage rumbled along the road by the sea she was filled with elation. She did not want to go back to London again, but she was glad to have been there. Now, coming back to this little village in which she had spent so many years of her life, she felt content to stay with her kind neighbours. She would play bridge with the Montgomerys and the doctor's wife, she would walk in her garden, and sometimes she would climb that little lane up to the high fields, and look down on the village and watch the blue smoke floating above the chimneys. Or she would go down the hill to the beach, and watch the fishermen mending their nets or putting out to sea, or coming back from their fishing. Everyone had said how well she looked . . . everyone in the village, now, said how well she

looked. And she felt well, and glad to be alive in this dear, lovely world!

She got out of the carriage at her door, and turned for a moment or two to look about her garden and listen to the twitterings of birds in her trees; and while she stood there, feeling the warmth of the sun on her hands and face, she said to herself: "How happy dear Henry would be if he could see me now, looking so well! I wish I had been strong when he was alive, so that I could have gone for walks with him. We should have been very happy!"

AMBITION

I MET him in Kew Gardens, where the rhododendrons are thickest. He was standing gazing at a great clump of red blooms, and there was a curious little smile on his face, expressive of the pleasure a child or a savage must feel in contemplating a pleasing but uncomprehended thing. It would indeed have been a most insensible creature that could have passed between those bright bushes unmoved, and there was nothing singular in the fact that a man should be standing still in front of the rhododendrons with a glad look on his face. It was when I met him later on that I thought him an odd sort of being. We sat on the same seat, and we laughed at precisely the same moment when a child went by, making a curious sound by way of singing; and that made us friends for the little while that we sat there, gazing idly about us. He was a little thin man, with delicate features and mild grey eyes. His hair was thin and wispy and discoloured, but neatly brushed. His clothes were old, but, save for their age, impeccable. There was about him an air of dinginess that was difficult to describe. You could not say that he was dingy because his clothes were very worn or unsightly, or his trousers were baggy and frayed at the edges, or his boots were down-at-heel or thin-soled; for none of those things was true. He did not appear

to you in parts; he appeared to you as a whole, and that whole amazingly dingy.

I discovered that he was a bookseller's assistant, and I was pleased to learn that this was his occupation; for I am a lover of books, and I thought to myself: "Now I shall be able to talk about books and bookmen for an hour or so with one who knows something of both. . . ."

"I don't do much reading myself," he said. "Don't 'ave the time." I was overwhelmed at the dropped aitch. Such mutilation of language was becoming, no doubt, in a grocer or an insurance agent, or some such clod, but utterly improper in one who handled books. "Reading isn't much in my line," he continued; "not what you would call reading. I mean to say, I read the paper now and again, when I have time, I mean, and I always get *Rule Britannia*"—that is not the name of the paper he mentioned—"but not what you would call reading, I don't. I 'aven't the time for it."

I inquired whether he never felt any desire to take down a book from its shelf in a quiet part of the day and read it.

"Not what you would call read it, I don't," he repeated. "I might 'ave a look at the pictures, if there were any, or blow the dust off the edges, or look at the price on the fly-leaf; but not what you would call read."

I shifted the conversation to other topics. It was disappointing to have drawn so hopeless a blank on the subject of books, and so I went to that ignoble thing, politics. I said what I thought of this party and that, one political policy and another, that politician

and the other politician, and then inquired what his views were. He dared say I was right. He was not one of those who took much interest in politics. In his opinion they were all much alike, meaning thereby that they were all equally bad. He was inclined to think that there was a great deal in political life which could do with a little showing up—he quite agreed with *Rule Britannia* about that. Not that he thought that things were quite as bad as *Rule Britannia* sometimes tried to make out; he believed in moderation in all things, and particularly in expressions of opinion; but this he did think, and this he was prepared to assert emphatically: things were not as good as they might be, and could very well be improved. Of course, he added, he might be wrong. Who mightn't? The greatest in the world might sometimes be wrong. He well remembered how his father, now lamentably dead, had said that the man who never made a mistake never made anything; and he was inclined to think that that was true. But still, making all allowances for error, he thought that things were not so good as they might be.

"I don't really take much interest in politics, of course. I don't 'ave the time. You see, I 'ave to be at the shop so long, I 'ave to be there at nine, you know, and we don't close until eight. Charing Cross Road hours are very late, you see, and on Saturdays it's later still; so, of course, I don't 'ave the time, do I?"

I remarked that his life did not appear to be a very exhilarating one. "Oh, I don't know," he replied. "It's not so bad, you know. It could be worse, couldn't it? I know some people much worse off than I am—I do,

really. It's not what you would call an exciting life, not very, I mean, but it's regular, and you get used to it; and, of course, excitement doesn't suit some men. It mightn't suit me. You never know, do you? So perhaps it's as well things are like they are."

He never went to a theatre or a concert or to any sort of amusement. He hadn't the time. His chief, if not his sole, recreation was a little stroll in the Gardens on a Sunday morning.

"It's just as well, perhaps," he said, "that I 'aven't much time for any of those things. You see, in our business the pay is very small—very small—not what you would call much; and if I 'ad much time on my 'ands I might get discontented, and I shouldn't like that. Probably it's good for me. My father used to say 'ard work never killed no one, and I think that's true."

I looked at the little, mean-looking man with the mild grey eyes and the delicate features, sitting there surrounded by the splendidly coloured rhododendrons, shaming us humans with their magnificence, and of a sudden I became presumptuous.

"Don't you ever get tired of the monotony of it?" I asked him.

"Oh, no," he replied. "What would be the good?"

"But don't you feel you want to do something better than that with your life? Ambition, I mean?"

For the first time a look of yearning came into his eyes, and he stared steadily in front of him for a second or so.

"Yes," he said, after a little while, "sometimes I think it would be nice to have two pounds a week certain. . . ."

THE BLIND MAN

THERE was a man that was blind from his birth to whom sight was given suddenly. He saw before he knew that he could see, and since he did not know that his sight had been given to him he was afraid, for he thought that there was something the matter with his eyes.

Those who were passing stopped to listen to him. "Why, what ails you?" they demanded of the blind man.

"I am afraid," he replied. "There was nothing in my eyes a moment ago, and now there are great shadows! . . ."

"What do you see?" they said.

"See!" cried the blind man impatiently. "I cannot see. Have I not told you that I am blind?"

"But tell us what is in your eyes."

The blind man stood for a moment quietly, and his eyes looked fixedly towards the man who held his hand.

"There is a great shadow in my eyes," he said at last, "and sound comes from it. It moves. Oh, I am afraid! . . . Is that a man?"

And the man who held his hand said, "I am a man, and these that are about me are men and women. Those are houses that you see reaching above you."

"I am afraid to move!"

"Come," they said, "take but one step. It will be easy when you have done that."

"I am afraid," he said, looking up at the great buildings on either side of the street. "I am afraid that they will fall on me."

The crowd laughed at him, saying, "We have walked between those houses since we were born, and they have done us no harm. We built them."

"But I have not seen them before."

"You knew that they were there. You have lived in some of them. You can see them now. Look how we push them, and they do not fall!"

"It is very strange," said the blind man.

"Now, you must walk," they urged again.

"I must walk!"

He put his foot out as he had done in the days when he could not see.

"No," they said, "you must lift your feet from the ground. You must not drag them so. It is only blind men who shuffle along. Men who can see lift their feet from the ground."

"I shall fall."

"We will save you if you fall."

He stood still, gazing queerly at the street.

"What is all that?" he asked, pointing to the horses and carts that passed rapidly.

"That is the traffic," they said. "You must not step off the pavement until you are accustomed to the sight of it. Even men who see are sometimes afraid of it. It moves so quickly."

"I wish I had not lost my blindness!"

"It is cowardly to say that!"

"I was happy in my blindness!"

"You will be happy with your sight."

"I do not want to see! There is so much to learn."

"You cannot help yourself," they said. "You are blind no longer. You can see. You must go on seeing!"

"I am afraid!"

They brought him to a quiet place so that he might get accustomed to seeing.

"Look about you," they said. "Look at the green."

"Green!" he said, puckering up the flesh between his eyes in the manner of one who is puzzled. "What is green?"

"It is a colour," they replied.

"Oh, yes," he said, trying to associate the word with the idea that had been in his mind before he had received his sight. "I understand. It is a colour."

"This is grass," they said.

"Grass! It is green, is it not?"

"It is."

"That is what green is," he said, looking at the grass intently. "May I take some?"

They put grass into his hands, and he looked at it for a long time. "That is green!" he murmured; and as he spoke his eyes wandered to a pine-tree that stood near. "What is that?" he asked; and they told him.

"Has it got colour, too?" he said.

"It also is green," they replied.

"But it is not the same colour as the grass!" He turned to them reproachfully. "You said that this was green," he exclaimed, holding out the blades of grass to them, "and now you say that that is green!" He pointed to the pine-tree. "You are deceiving me," he said bitterly. "I am a blind man and have never seen before. You are mocking me!"

Said they: "The grass and the pine-tree are both green. There are varieties of green. There is light green and dark green, the green of grass and the green of the pine-tree; there is green that is almost yellow, and green like blue and green like black. There is the green of holly leaves and ivy, and the green of corn and wheat. There is the green of young leaves in spring and the green of old leaves in autumn. There is not one green, but many kinds of green."

"And are all things like that?" he asked.

"All things are like that," they replied.

"Then, indeed, it were better for me that I had remained blind. How shall I find my way through the world, when I must stop to learn all these things about one thing? When I have learned green I must learn blue, and when I have learned blue I must learn red. When I know the pine-tree I must learn to know the oak and the ash and the willow. I am too old to learn all these things. I do not want my sight. I wish to be blind again. I was happy when I was blind. I could move about without fear. My stick tapping on the ground enabled me to find my way. I am not happy without my stick."

. . . . .

They left the blind man, and told him he must learn to walk by himself. He besought them not to leave him, and moaned piteously when they said they must go. "We have much to do," they said. "You must learn to stand by yourself, so that you may come and help us."

"I shall never be able to help," he said. "I shall never cease to be afraid."

When they had gone he sat down on the ground, and was filled with despair. The clouds passing swiftly over his head caused him to tremble lest they should fall out of the sky and overwhelm him in disaster. He sat for a long time, looking about him, and then said to himself, "I will try to walk." He raised himself slowly and fearfully from the ground and stood up. He became dizzy and swayed a little. "I shall fall down," he said to himself. But though he swayed a little and his legs rocked, he did not fall. He moved, and then, his voice being tremulous, said, "I can walk a step, I can walk!" He moved quickly, and fell. "I knew," he said ruefully, and he rubbed himself where he had been bruised. "I knew that I should fall!" And he declared that he would walk no more. But after a while he said he would try again, and he walked a long way until he came to the end of the field where a hedge was. "I can walk!" he said joyfully. "I can walk! I can walk!" He turned to walk back again, and when he had gone part of the way, he said, "I will run!" And he ran, but so quickly that he could not stop, and he collided with the hedge, and was torn by the thorns. "I will walk," he said, "but I will not run."

. . . . .

After he had walked and had run and had leaped, and could go about the earth like other men, he came to the town and walked through the street in which his sight had come to him. And he was not afraid. He walked easily. "It is almost," he said, "as if I were blind again!"

THE WELL OF YOUTH

MICHAEL CREGAN and I were walking through the Vale of Avoca, when we came to St. Brigid's Well, that was gushing out of a rock. Said I: "It's the great thirst I have on me, and I'll take a drink." To which Michael replied: "Now, be aisy wi' that watter, fur sure ye don't know the harrum ye might do t' yerself."

"And what's the matter with the water?" I asked.

"Sure, don't ye know the quality of it?" was the question that he put to me in reply.

"I do not," said I.

"Aw, now, it's the good job I was wi' ye, or ye might be destroyed through yer ignerance."

"What's the matter with it, anyway?" I exclaimed.

"Did ye nivir hear tell o' the man an' his wife that drunk o' it wi'out knowin' annythin' about it? John O'Neill was his name, an' a dacent man, an' the name o' his wife was Bridget, but she wus beside herself wi' consate, an' didden like t' be called Biddy. 'Me name's Bride,' she wud say, spakin' like a publican's wife thrum Dublin."

"I never heard a word about them in my life. . . ."

"An' you been t' college an' all, wi' the larnin' o' Trinity in yer head!"

"Well, you tell me about it, for dear sake," said I,

"and not be standing there making a clatter with your tongue, and me nearly dead with the drouth!"

"Sure, have yer drink, but don't take too much, an' I'll tell ye about it as sure as ye're stan'in' there."

I drank eagerly of the cool clear water that comes out of a rock and is called St. Brigid's Well; for St. Brigid, I would have you know, was as great a woman as St. Patrick was a man, and many a tale is told of her in Ireland this day that I would tell to you had I the time.

"You'll be wanting a drink yourself, mebbe?" said I to Michael when I had drunk my fill.

"I do that," said he, and ducked his head down and drank as I had done. And when he had finished we resumed our journey through the Vale of Avoca, and he told me this tale of the man that was called O'Neill and his wife Bridget and the strange thing that befell them at the well of St. Brigid.

. . . . .

"He wus an ould man wus John O'Neill whin he come til these parts. It was thrum the north he come, an' wus descended thrum the O'Neills of Ulster. Manny a time ye'd be seein' somethin' in a paper about the Red Han' o' O'Neill. It wus that family he belonged til. He married a wumman quaren younger nor himself. Mebbe twenty year younger she wus, an' wus the daughter o' a man that kep' a shop in Enniskillen. Sure, she was no match fur him in blood. Her family was English an' nathin' til spake of at all. She wus the quare one fur lettin' on about herself. She wud tell ye her age was twenty-eight, an' her near

double that, an' the wrinkles roun' her eyes like cart tracks in a loanin' in wet weather. But sure, ye cudden shame the wumman an' affront her afore her own man that knew as well as she did what her age wus, an' ye cud on'y purtend ye belaved her. It's a poor thing t' be exposin' tricks that do no harrum.

"Wan day whin John O'Neill wus comin' the very way we're walkin' now, carryin' a load o' somethin' or another on his back, an' him that tired he cud har'ly walk, fur he wus near bent wi' age already, t' say nathin' o' a load as well, he come up til St. Brigid's Well, an', ses he, as ye might say yerself, 'It's a rest I'll be havin' an' a drink o' water t' drink, fur I'm that tired an' thirsty I'm fit t' drop!' An' wi' that he throws down his load on the groun', an', groanin' like a wheel that hassen had grease at it fur a year, he tries til straighten his back. 'Sure, I wish I wus thirty years younger,' ses he, 'an' it's not makin' me tired a load like that wud be.' An' whin he'd had a bit o' a rest he stooped down an' tuk a drink, an' he drunk a quare lot. An' whin he stud up again ye wudden belave but he wus a young man. Thirty years wus aff his age as sure as ye're stan'in' there! 'Lord bliss me sowl!' ses he, 'this is the quare set-out! Sure, me wife'll not know me at all whin I git home!' He stretched himself, an' begun to caper about like a wil' thing. 'Ah, now,' ses he, 'issen this the quare fine thing's happened t' me? I come in here an ould man an' I'm goin' out young!'"

Michael broke off in his story to comment on this. "Sure, that's the way it ought t' be, anny way, though

mebbe it's the same thing whin ye come t' think o' it. Ye git quaren like a chile whin ye git ould, they say."

He proceeded with the story.

"He picked up his load, an' it wus no trouble til him at all. 'Och!' ses he, 'I cud carry a dozen loads the like o' this, an' not feel it at all!' When he got til his house, sure wussen Bridget stan'in' there, and didden know a bit o' him. She lukked at him amazed, an' ses she, 'Who are ye at all? Sure, I uset t' know somewan quaren like ye, but I can't lay me min' t' who it wus.' 'Och! don't ye know me, Bride?' ses he, caperin' about like a young goat. 'Is it me man ye are?' ses she. 'It is that!' ses he. 'Aw, glory be t' God!' ses she, 'an' what's come over ye?' 'Come on intil the house,' ses he, 'an' I'll tell ye.' They wint intil the house, an' he tould her about St. Brigid's Well, an' ses he, 'Me girl, ye're alwis purtendin' ye're twenty-eight, an' you near double that age. It's a pity ye don't go til the well an' git a drink yerself, so's ye cud be young in truth.' He hadden got the words out o' his mouth afore she jumped up and put her shawl roun' her head. 'Will ye tell me where it is,' ses she, 'an' I'll go there this minit?' 'I will, surely,' ses he, an' he give her full directions, an' as soon as she heard him, aff she wint as hard as she cud, which wussen very hard, fur she wus gettin' stout in her ould age an' wussen althegither firm on her feet. Whin she'd gone, John O'Neill sut down in the house afore the fire an' lit his pipe, til wait fur her comin' back. He waited an' waited, but she wus the quare long time

comin'. 'She oughta be back be this time,' ses he. 'Sure, it's not as far as that.'

"He was beginnin' til git a bit onaisy, an' he kep' on goin' til the dure til see if she wus comin', but there wussen a sign o' her annywhere. It wus beginnin' til git dark, an' so he walked a bit o' the way til meet her, but not a bit o' her did he see. 'Now, issen it provokin',' ses he, 'the way that wumman carries on? Sure, she cud ha' bin there an' back twice over if she'd liked. I suppose I'll have t' go after her, an' see what's become o' her. An' whin I'm there I may as well take another drop o' the blessed watter.'

"He walked on an' on, an' as he walked it got darker and darker. 'It's hard til fin' yer way in the dark nights,' ses he, 'whin ye're a stranger in a district. I hope no harrum's come til her. . . .' After a while he come til the Vale o' Avoca, an' not a sign o' his wife cud he see annywhere. He wus in a tarr'ble state. 'Dear-a-dear,' ses he, 'what'll I do wi'out me wumman!' An' wi' that he comes up til the well, an' as soon as he got there he heard someone cryin', an' goin' up, he saw a babby that wus cryin' its eyes out.

"'What ails ye?' ses he.

"'D'ye not know me?' ses the chile.

"'I do not, indeed,' ses he; 'an' it's the strange thing til hear a chile talkin' like a grown wumman!'

"'Sure, I'm yer wife!' ses the chile.

"'Ye're me what?' ses he.

"'I'm yer wife,' ses she.

"'Holy Murdher!' ses he, 'what's happened til ye at all?'

"'I did what ye tould me,' ses she. 'I come here an' drunk the watter, an' felt meself gittin' younger, an' it was that fine a feelin' til be young again that I furgot til stap, an' I tuk too much!'"

. . . . .

Michael and I came out of the Vale of Avoca together, and parted company. "Ye shud alwis be careful," said he, "not to be too greedy at the Well o' Youth."

"It's a fine tale," I replied; and maybe something in my voice made him think I was mocking him.

"It's no lie I'm tellin' ye," he said, "but the God's truth!"

"Och, away out of that with you!" said I, for I've lived in towns and the sap of life has gone out of me. "It would take more water than's in the well of St. Brigid to make me young enough to believe a tale like that!"

"Aw, God help ye," said Michael, "but ye're in the quare bad way! Sure, if ye don't want til belave a thing, it dussen matter whether it's true or not; and if ye do want til belave it, sure it dussen matter aythir."

COLLEAGUES

Mr. Justice McBurnie stepped quickly into the shelter of the little passage, and collided with the man who had already taken refuge there.

"I beg your pardon," he murmured. "It's very dark. . . ."

"That's all right, sir," the stranger replied in a cheery voice. "Bit awkward comin' in 'ere out of the light, ain't it? Sudden, I mean."

"Yes," replied the judge, turning to look at the rain-drenched street. "A very heavy shower," he added.

"Yes, an' come on so sudden, too. Funny sort of weather we bin 'avin' lately, ain't we? One minute sun shinin', an' the next you get soaked through. No certainty about it. I suppose it's bein' so near the sea, an' the 'ills, an' one thing an' another."

"I suppose so," said Mr. Justice McBurnie in the tone of one who is indifferent to the conversation of his companion. He looked for a moment at him, and saw a small man, seemingly of mild manners, with an odd way of smiling when he spoke, as though beneath his most commonplace phrase there lurked some inscrutably comic meaning known only to him.

"You're a native of this town?" asked the judge.

"Oh, yes. Born an' bred 'ere. I got a shop, you know."

"Indeed!"

"Yes. I do a bit of travellin' now an' again. Nothink to speak of. . . . Gummy, ain't it comin' down, eh?"

The storm had grown in severity while they stood in the passage, and the rain came down in sheets.

"Most unfortunate," murmured Mr. Justice McBurnie. "I've come quite a long way from my hotel without an umbrella or a mackintosh. I hope it won't last much longer."

The little man smiled in his odd, superior, knowing way. "You never know," he said, "now the Assizes is on!"

"The Assizes!"

"Yes. Some people say there's bound to be bad weather when the Assizes is on. 'Specially when there's a murder case. Funny the things people do say about Assizes, ain't it?"

The judge did not reply.

"Now, there's my ole mother. She would 'ave it that it was against the law for a butcher to serve on a jury tryin' a man for 'is life. She wouldn't believe it wasn't true. Of course, it ain't true. I ast a gentleman once—'e was a lawyer, you know—an' 'e said 'e'd never 'eard of such a thing."

"What a curious thing for your mother to believe!" said Mr. Justice McBurnie, turning to the garrulous little man.

"Yes it was, wasn't it? Of course, she don't believe it now, sir. She's dead."

"Oh, indeed!"

"Yes. She was a good ole soul. Seventy-two she was, an' 'ad 'er senses to the last. But she wouldn't believe it wasn't true about butchers, sir, not if the queen 'erself 'ad swore it on the Bible. She said it stood to reason butchers wouldn't be allowed to try a man for his life. 'Killin' animals all day,' she said, 'made 'em callous, an' they'd 'ang you as soon as look at you!' "

Mr. Justice McBurnie laughed. "Oh," he said, "was that why she objected to butchers on juries?"

"Yes, sir, an' you couldn't shake 'er out of it. Of course, butchers is a bit 'ard. No doubt about it. Stan's to reason, as she said. You can't go on takin' life like they do an' not get a bit 'ardened, can you? On'y wot I used to say to 'er was, it ain't the law. It may be common sense, ses I, but it ain't the law. But she would 'ave it that it was. Stubborn, sir! Seventy-two, she was, but *that* stubborn!"

The judge advanced towards the edge of the passage and gazed up at the dark sky, and then up and down the street.

"It doesn't seem to get any better," he said.

"No," said the stranger, "it won't now, I shouldn't think."

"I wonder if I could get a cab or some sort of vehicle?"

The little man thought it was probable that he might. "I'll go up to the 'ead of the street," he said, "when the rain's over a bit, an' see if I can get one for you."

"You're very kind . . ."

"Oh, no, sir, not at all! You're a stranger 'ere, an' if we can't do a thing like that for a stranger. wot's the good of us?"

They stood in silence for a few moments, and then the little man began to speak again.

"You know, 'e must feel a bit queer to-night, I should think."

"I beg your pardon," exclaimed Mr. Justice McBurnie.

"The chap wot's goin' to be tried to-morrow. Young fella, 'e is. Killed a girl 'e was walkin' out with."

"Oh, yes! Yes, yes!"

"I suppose you 'eard about it. Jealousy!"

The judge nodded his head.

"Now, there's a thing I can't understand, you know. If I was walkin' out with a girl, an' she got up to any tricks, runnin' after other fellas, I wouldn't go an' kill 'er or nothink. I'd simply tell 'er to go to 'ell, or somethink of that sort. Silly to go an' get 'ung for her! Some people's funny-natured, ain't they?"

"That's true."

"We ain't all alike, of course. Wouldn't do if we was. But I mean to say I can't understand a chap goin' an' killin' a girl for a thing like that. I mean to say, there don't seem no sense in it, some'ow."

"There isn't."

"No. An' yet they go an' do it. I've knowed case after case like that. Decent enough young fellas, you know, on'y they go an' do a thing like that. It seems a pity, some'ow."

"Yes . . ."

"Of course, you 'ave to be firm about it. It wouldn't do to go lettin' 'em off or anythink, on'y some'ow. . . . Well, there was that young chap Smith—now, 'e wasn't a bad chap, 'e wasn't. A bit 'ot-'eaded. 'E done the same's this chap, an' 'e got 'ung same's this one will . . ."

"How do you know this one will be hanged?"

"Oh, 'e'll be 'ung all right! The judge can't 'elp 'isself. Clear case. Clear as anythink. I dessay the judge won't like doin' it. No one would. On'y it's got to be done. You've got to 'ave judges, an' if people goes about killin' other people, the judges 'ave got to sentence them to death. Can't 'elp theirselves. That's 'ow I look at it."

"I daresay you are right. I think the rain is going off. I believe it'll stop soon."

"Can't help theirselves. It's got to be done, an' if it's got to be done, someone's got to do it. That's wot I told my ole mother about butchers. No good cursin' 'em, an' callin' 'em 'ard-'earted an' all that, if you eat meat. You can't 'ave meat unless there's butchers. I don't s'pose they do it for the fun of the thing!"

"No, I daresay not," said Mr. Justice McBurnie. "Do you think you could do what you so kindly suggested a few moments ago: get a cab for me? I'm sorry to trouble you. . . ."

"No trouble at all, sir." The little man walked to the entrance to the passage and stood there for a moment or two while he turned up the collar of his

coat. "You know," he said, turning to the judge, "they'll 'ang 'im all right. Can't help theirselves!"

"Well, well," said the judge impatiently.

"You know," continued the little man, "it's the first case in this town. We got a new gaol 'ere. I'm a bit interested in the case."

"Naturally."

"I knoo 'im well, sir. Often an' often 'e'd come into my shop to 'ave a shave. Very partickler 'e was about bein' shaved. Very partickler. Couldn't bear to 'ave it done *up*. Very tender skin 'e 'ad."

"If you wouldn't mind . . ."

"Don't mind a bit, sir. Not a bit. I never thought 'e would come to this. Come into my shop reg'lar 'e would. I never felt about anyone the way I do about 'im. . . ."

Mr. Justice McBurnie came to the little man's side and peered up the street. "I believe I can hear wheels," he said.

"So you can, sir. I'll just run up and fetch the cab, sir. Shan't be 'alf a sec!"

In a little while the cab came down the street and the judge stepped out of the passage.

"Won't you let me drive you home?" he said to the stranger.

"It's very kind of you, I'm sure, sir. I ain't got far to go . . ."

"You've been so very obliging," continued the judge. "I should like to . . ."

"Well, thank you, sir."

They stepped into the cab and the judge told

the stranger the name of the hotel at which he was stopping.

"You'd better tell him to drive to your home first, and then he can take me to the hotel."

"Yes, sir." He called the name of his street to the cabman. "That's the name of the 'otel where the judge is stoppin'," he said, as they drove off.

Mr. Justice McBurnie leant back in his seat and smiled. "Yes," he said, "I am the judge."

The stranger sat up and regarded him with curiosity. "Are you, now!" he said. "You know, that's strange, that is! You an' me's in the same line of business, so to speak."

"Indeed!"

"Yes. Funny coincidence, I call it, you an' me talkin' the way we was about *'im.*"

"About whom?"

"'Im as killed the girl. 'E'd be surprised to 'ear about this, 'e would."

"I'm afraid I don't understand," said Mr. Justice McBurnie.

"Well, it's simple enough, sir. You're the judge an' I'm the 'angman."

Mr. Justice McBurnie sat up in his seat, and the smile disappeared from his lips. He tried to speak, but the words clung to his teeth and would not be uttered.

"Sort of in the same business, you an' me," said the little man. "You begin it, and I end it. Funny coincidence, I call it. Fancy me tellin' you about 'im, an' you the judge and me the 'angman! Used to come into

my shop reg'lar 'e did, an' 'ave a shave. Very partickler, 'e was. . . . Wot did you say, sir?"

Mr. Justice McBurnie did not speak.

"I expec' you're tired, sir. Up too late. I get out 'ere. You know, when you come to think of it, it's a funny coincidence. . . . Goo'-night, sir! Goo'-night!"

RETIREMENT

MR. MARTIN awoke at five o'clock and stretched himself in bed. "Funny," he said, "'ow I keep on wakin' up same's if I was goin' to work!" He lay still for a few moments, blinking at the ceiling, and then, in the manner of one who has attacked a problem and found it insoluble, murmured, "I dunno! 'Abit, I suppose!"

He turned over on his side, pulled the bedclothes tightly about him, and resolutely shut his eyes. He lay so for five minutes, and then, kicking the clothes away, got out of bed. "No good," he said; "only makin' meself silly tryin' to sleep on!"

He dressed himself and, descending to the kitchen, busied himself lighting the fire and putting his house in order. He lived alone. His wife had been dead for so long a time that it seemed to him almost as if he had never been married, and after her death, being childless, he had continued to live on in the house, doing such work as was necessary himself. He was a victim of the work habit. He could not sit down and be decently idle. He planned out schemes for filling all the moments of his life when he was not asleep. He got his wife to teach knitting to him so that he might be employed at those times when he had to sit still, a thing that he loathed doing.

Oddly enough, he disliked work. His supreme desire

was for a life of slow effort and leisure; a time when he could take things easy. His apparently consuming craving for work was not due to his love of work, but to a desire to get enough money saved to be able to retire from work altogether. And so he had devoted his youth to joyless, restless days and nights, abstaining from all recreation and pleasure because, so far from bringing money to him, they took money from him. He had turned his wife, a quiet, subdued woman, into a machine for saving money.

And here was the result. He was now a man of means, living in retirement. He was positively a man of independent income. He could get up when he liked, dally over his food as long as he liked, go out or stay in, make holiday or work, just as he pleased. For six months before the actual date of his retirement his spirits had been so buoyant that his familiars imagined he had gone out of his wits. He would now and then cease from working to chuckle aloud!

When he had resigned his post his employers held a meeting of their workmen, and before them all called him "a faithful servant." They presented him with a letter of thanks, signed by each member of the firm, and awarded a pension to him. An account of the proceedings appeared in the local paper, together with his photograph. . . . Reward, indeed, for all that he had done!

Every morning since then (and that was a fortnight ago) he had enjoyed the bliss of lying in bed and stretching his legs, knowing that he need not get up, though all his friends were hurrying sleepily towards

their jobs. It astonished him to find that he could not lie on until eight o'clock, as he had always vowed he would. Each night, on retiring, he solemnly pledged himself not to get up at five, and each morning he broke his pledge.

"Can't 'elp it," he said to himself, by way of excuse. "Of course," he went on, "it'll take me some time to get used to it. Only natural that, any'ow!"

. . . . .

Whilst he was preparing his breakfast and telling himself that it was silly for him to do this menial work—"Only fit for women!"—and that he must really engage a good servant, the newspaper boy threw the morning journal through the open door. Mr. Martin went and picked it up. "Don't 'ave to wait now to read the paper," he said. "It's all right bein' able to sit down to your breakfis with the paper an' take as long as you like."

It was the one solid pleasure he had as yet derived from his retirement, the privilege of reading the day's news at leisure. He read the paper, while he ate his meal, from the title on the front page almost to the name of the printer at the foot of the last column on the last page. It was his way of asserting the fact that he could do what he liked with his time. But even newspapers come to an end, and when he had reluctantly discarded the journal, he busied himself clearing away the remnants of his meal and restoring the room to order.

"Wonder what I shall do now," he said to himself, when he had done this. "Lemme see! Yesterday I

went for a walk to the Square, an' looked at all the shops, an' then I come 'ome again! An' the day before yesterday I walked to the Square. . . . Lord bless me, I done the same that day as I done yesterday! No good doin' that every day. Lemme see, now, wot'll I do to-day?"

He sat still for a few moments—it was really a few moments, but it seemed to him, so unused was he to sitting still, to be an interminably long time—and then got up and put on his coat and hat. "I dunno," he said. "Don't seem to be nowhere to go excep' the Square!"

He went out into the street, and walked slowly towards the centre of the town. Every now and then he caught himself walking quickly, and stopped short. "No need to 'urry now!" he said. "Got all day to get there!" He arrived at the Square, and walked past all the shops without looking into any of them. "I seen them all now," he said to himself, and then added a little querulously, "Tired of seein' 'em!" He came to the Free Library, and decided to go in. "'Tain't no good, though," he murmured. "I'm no 'and at readin'!"

It was a slack time of the year, and many unemployed men were in the Reading Room. The newspapers were all monopolised, and so were all the illustrated papers. There was nothing left for Mr. Martin but the heavy quarterly reviews and trade journals and things like the *Vegetarians' Gazette* and the *Theosophists' Review*, none of which made any appeal to him. He waited patiently while a lady solidly read through the *Illustrated London News*, and then

found it was a copy he had already seen. He got up in disgust and went out into the Square again.

"Wot a nole this place is," he said. "Ain't nothink to do!"

He hesitated for a while outside a picture palace, but did not enter. "Only fit for kids an' women," he said, and turned away. He walked on all sides of the Square again, looking into the window of each shop that he passed, hoping to see something of interest. At the last shop but one he was rewarded: an assistant was re-dressing the window, and the old man spent an exhilarating half-hour watching him do it. But he got tired of standing still, and so he drifted out of the Square into some of the neighbouring streets. In High Street he met his former manager.

"Hilloa!" exclaimed the manager, "enjoying yourself, eh?"

"Oh, yes," replied Mr. Martin. "I'm 'avin' a great time, walkin' about doin' nothink!"

"Well," the manager rejoined, "you've worked hard enough for it, and you deserve a rest!"

"That's true enough," said Mr. Martin, as they separated. "I'm not sure I ain't worked too 'ard!"

He got tired of walking about aimlessly. It was too soon to return home for his midday meal. He had an hour or two to get through before he need do that, and it came to him forcibly that he had done all the things he usually did. He became a little angry about it, and blamed his town for its lack of interesting things. He had few friends; he had been too busy working to make friends; he took no interest in poli-

tics, because, so far as he could see, they were unprofitable; and the newspapers and magazines confused him. He could not sit still, and he could not think. He had allowed his mind to go out of training for years, and at his age it was impossible to get it to run smoothly again. He had spent his life in continual labour in order that this time when he could dispense with labour might come, and had neglected the things that would make leisure worth while; and now that he had leisure, leisure was irksome to him, for he did not know what to do with it.

"I'm getting sick of this 'ere," he said, stumping round angrily. "Give a chap the 'ump this sort of thing does! I've a good mind to go an' get a job."

The manager of his old firm came round the corner as he thought this, and the old man impulsively went up to him.

"Look 'ere, Mr. 'Arper," he said, "can I come back to the shop to-morrow mornin'?"

The manager looked at him in amazement.

"Come back to the shop!" he exclaimed. "Good Heavens, what do you want to do that for?"

"Well, you see, it's like this! I dunno wot the 'ell to do with myself! I ain't used to this sort of life. I 'ave a feelin' I'll go silly if I don't get somethink to do!"

"Well, why don't you enjoy yourself?"

"I can't. I don't know 'ow to. You see, I always bin a nard worker!"

"Yes, yes, that's true!"

"An' if you could see your way! . . ."

The manager, looking uncomfortable, cleared his throat a little, and said, "You see it's difficult. We've given your job to another man, and of course you're not so young as you used to be, are you?"

"No, that's true enough. I'm sixty-six!"

"We really need a young man for your work. We felt that several years ago, but you were such a faithful servant, we didn't like to . . . You understand!"

The old man looked at his manager in a puzzled way for a few moments, and then began to understand.

"You mean you was glad to get rid of me?" he began.

"Not quite that, but . . ."

Mr. Martin turned away, for Mr. Martin felt himself doing something he had never done before, not even when his wife died: *he was crying.*

"It's all right, sir," he said. "P'raps you're right."

The manager, affecting jocularity, bade him pull himself together, and wished him good-morning.

"You just knock about and enjoy yourself," he said.

"Yes, sir," said Mr. Martin, "I'll 'ave a try!"

He stood still for a moment, after the manager had gone, wondering what he should do next.

"I think," he said, "I'll go for a walk in the Square, and look at the shops!"

MR. PEDEN KEEPS HIS COOK

I

My neighbour in the dining-room of the Belmont Hotel was one of those amiable old gentlemen who live in hotels and take an entirely philanthropic interest in the management. It was painful to him to see the number of guests present on any one occasion falling below what he called "the profitable average," and each evening, so he told me, he counted the people at dinner with some anxiety for the manager's welfare. When the meals were good, he went about the lounge remarking on their excellence and inviting the rest of us to marvel how on earth the management was able to do it. When the meals were poor, he invented excuses to account for their inadequacy. Cooks, he reminded us, had their "off" days. Things unaccountably went wrong. Probably the provisioners had "let the management down." These and other kindly covers for temporary incompetence were part of his stock in trade as a friend of the hotel. He really was invaluable to any company, for he had none of that reticence which makes people reluctant to speak to strangers until they have had a day or two in which to size them up; and so he made a stay in any hotel where he was a guest much more agreeable for the shy stranger than

it would otherwise have been. He was always drawing people into any friendly circle there was. He had stayed so long at the Belmont that he knew its history backward, so to speak, and had an extensive acquaintance in the town. The fact that I was his immediate neighbour, together with the additional fact that I was ill and alone, made him take a special interest in me, and while I thought him a trifle ridiculous at times and wished that he were not always so affable, I am bound to acknowledge that he made my stay at the Belmont very pleasant. It was he who told me the story of Mr. Peden's cook. One morning, when he and I were sitting on a seat on the esplanade, looking over the sea, a dejected-looking man, accompanied by a very determined woman, went by. The expression on the man's face and the expression on the woman's were so definite that I watched them for some moments after they had gone past, and I had almost forgotten my neighbour when I heard him say:

"Those are the Pedens!"

"Oh," said I, in that tone which denotes that the information just given has not informed us.

"Odd couple," he continued.

"Indeed."

"Yes, very odd. Partly they're comic, and partly they're tragic."

"How do you mean?" I demanded.

"She was his cook," he replied.

"Ah!" I said, with an air of comprehension.

He saw the look on my face and hastened to assure me that I was wrong.

"No," he said, "it wasn't anything like that. He was not trapped into marrying her; nothing of the sort. He deliberately and willingly married her."

"Well, why is he looking so down in the mouth about it, then?" I asked.

"Ah, that's the comic tragedy," he answered. "Look! They're coming back."

I glanced in the direction of the Pedens. They had reached the end of the esplanade and were now returning towards us. The look of dejection seemed to be permanently fixed on the man's face, but I thought that his wife, in her grim, resolved way, was enjoying herself. He walked in a crouching fashion, and he seldom looked about him. Almost he might have been trying not to see anybody on the esplanade. But Mrs. Peden's eyes were everywhere. She appeared to be as eager to see people as he was not to see them, and when my neighbour raised his hat to her, she bowed in a somewhat excessive, but quite friendly, fashion. Peden gave us a quick and almost angry glance, and then went on.

"Hardly a success, is it?" I said, when they were out of earshot.

"The marriage? No, it isn't, so far as he's concerned!" my neighbour answered.

"As far as she's concerned, too, surely?"

"Oh, she's happy enough. She's got what she wanted."

"But are women happy when they get what they want?" I remarked, with a cynicism which I now know was the result of my recent illness. I should be ashamed to be as cheap as that in ordinary health.

"Of course they are," he vigorously answered. "Women are always happy when they've got what they want. That's where they differ from men. They want to possess things; men only want to get things. When a man's got a thing, he doesn't care about it any more; but when a woman's got a thing, she loves it all the better for having it. You put that in your pipe and smoke it, my friend. What men like is effort; what women like is possession."

"Humph!" said I, taken aback. "You're a philosopher, aren't you?"

"You'd be a philosopher if you'd lived in hotels as long as I have."

He was silent for a few moments.

"Well, aren't you going to tell me about the Pedens?" I asked at last.

"Like to hear the story?" he asked.

I nodded my head.

II

"She was his cook. That statement may not mean much to you, but it meant a great deal to him. Peden is fond of food. He is very fond of food. I do not think I am doing Peden an injustice when I say that the only thing on earth of which he is fond is food. When I first knew him, he seemed to spend the day wondering how long it would be before the next meal came round. When he went to bed, I think the only prayer he murmured was, 'Thank God, I shall be unconscious until breakfast-time!' Oh, he loved his food! Of that there is no doubt. He took exercise merely to

enable him to eat more food with greater ease. His favourite pastime was to sit here, where we're sitting now, and remember all the meals he had ever eaten and speculate on the number he had yet to eat. He could tell you what he had had for lunch on the first Tuesday in September in the year 1891. That was the sort of man Peden was. He was rather unique in his way."

"I should hope so," I said. "The fellow sounds repulsive."

"His difficulty, of course, was to get a cook who knew her job, and he spent a fair amount of time in registry-offices, searching for a really good cook. In one month he had three! He was perfectly ruthless about them. A single failure, and they went. A cook who could fail once could fail twice, he said, after which failure became a habit and success a rare achievement. He had more or less given up hope of securing an accomplished cook when he came to the 'Belmont.' I was staying here, too, so I saw the whole thing from the beginning. The 'Belmont' was unique in those days: it had a cook who could cook."

"Was there ever an hotel with such a cook?" said I.

"Yes," he answered, "the 'Belmont.' The food was delicious. I am no gourmet, and I am totally unable to go into raptures over my meals; but honestly, sir, I sometimes felt like bursting into song over the food in the 'Belmont.' That woman cooked it."

"What woman?"

"The one you've just seen—Mrs. Peden. She was the cook at the 'Belmont.' Even now I can taste—but

why recall the dead past? Peden's eyes nearly popped out of his head during his first dinner. He overate that night; in fact, he overate during the rest of his stay."

"The hog!" said I.

"You'd have overeaten, too, if you had been there. We all overate."

"Can't have been very profitable for the management."

"Their charges amply allowed for overeating," he replied. "I need not tell you that the hotel was always full. I remember that the management refused two hundred applications for rooms that summer. That sort of thing constantly happened. Managing the hotel was the merest child's play. What really wanted doing was managing the cook. Rival hotels tried to snatch her from the 'Belmont,' and the manager's time was spent in repelling his adversaries and increasing her wages. She was the best-paid cook in the county, perhaps in the whole of England. The manager of the 'Belmont'—Jordan was his name—knew perfectly well that if she went, the hotel more or less went, too. I did not envy him his job. Peden flourished mightily, and all went well until greed took complete possession of him. He said to himself: 'Why should I not have this superb cook all to myself? Why should I have to share her cooking with other people, most of whom are not sufficiently appreciative of good cooking to be worthy of her work?' He told himself that her great gift was being wasted on people who would be just as pleased with a plain roast of beef as they were with the best of her dishes. Such cooking as hers should be exclusively

reserved for connoisseurs. One would not offer a soufflé to a navvy. Why, then, should one offer a delicately cooked dish to men and women who looked upon boiled mutton and caper sauce as the best that this world has to offer to the stomachs of mankind! I cannot say that I sympathized with Peden's point of view. Only a very greedy and selfish man could have held it. He wanted to keep to himself what ought to have been shared with others. No, I do not sympathize with him. His punishment was dire, but it was deserved."

"Yes, go on," said I, slightly impatient.

"Well, Peden nobbled the cook."

"*Nobbled* her!"

"Yes. He's very cunning where food is concerned, and with remarkable ingenuity he contrived to get into the cook's good graces. He discovered that she had a passion for stories about the South Sea Islands,—you know the sort, about the beautiful brown girl who spends most of her time eating cocoanuts in a blue lagoon, and waiting to be wooed by a handsome young European in a nice, white linen suit,—and the old serpent used to buy her all the novels of that kind he could discover. Then he heard that a moving-picture full of heart interest was coming to the town, and when he realized that it was about the South Seas, he bought tickets and sent them to her. He met her coming out of the picture-palace and walked back to the hotel with her—*with the cook*, mind you, and discussed the film. He got into the habit of sending her tickets for the pictures. About that time there were several plays in the London theatres about the South Seas: *The Blue*

Lagoon and *The Bird of Paradise,* and a few others; and Peden actually got her tickets for them and paid her fares to town to see them. I tell you, Peden was a determined devil. He had made up his mind to get that cook away from the 'Belmont,' and he was setting about the job in a very workmanlike manner. He went so far as to ask her if she would like to go to the South Seas, but she said she would not. She had the sense to realize that the romances were probably more pleasant than the reality. He discovered that she liked Colemouth better than any other place in England. That, in fact, was one of the reasons why other hotel-managers were unable to tempt her away from the 'Belmont.' She could not think of a place which she preferred to Colemouth, and there was no hotel in Colemouth which was able to compete for her services with the 'Belmont.' Peden realized at once that he must either stay at the 'Belmont' or build a house in Colemouth if he wished to enjoy her cooking. There was no reason on earth why he shouldn't have stayed on at the hotel, except, of course, his selfish greed, but he resolved to build a house, and he promptly consulted the cook about it. Would she give him advice on the subject? Supposing, now, that she had the planning of a house in which she was to be cook, how would she have it designed?

"The fellow was cunning, no doubt about it! He submitted the architect's drawings to her. He persuaded her to choose a site for him. There was no concession to her vanity that he was not ready to make, if only it would enable him to get her away from the

'Belmont.' And he succeeded in the end. The house was built, and she was installed in the kitchen. I dare not tell you what wages he gave her, for you simply would not believe me; but I can assure you they were almost beyond belief. I do not suppose there ever was a happier man in this country than Peden on the day on which the cook firmly gave notice to the 'Belmont.' When he saw the look of dismay on Jordan's face, and realized what a calamity he had brought upon the hotel—well, Peden was happy. The news spread swiftly through the 'Belmont' and through Colemouth, and some of the guests went about the lounge looking as if they were about to be called up for judgment. The manager forgot himself, and said some pretty stiff things to Peden, and even ordered him out of the hotel, and would have thrown him out too, if Peden had not said that he would take the cook with him immediately instead of letting her serve out her month's notice. That sobered the manager, but it did not make Peden any more popular with the rest of us. Peden, in short, found himself without a friend. No one spoke to him, and some of the guests actually made audible remarks about him and his appetite. One old gentleman publicly hoped that Peden would have an apoplectic fit. Well, the cook went. Her last dinner was a miracle of good cooking. I remember now the lobster we ate that night—jellied in its shell and served with a delicious cold green sauce! I found the manager in tears in the office when she had gone. 'This means ruin for me!' he said, when I tried to cheer him up.

"And it nearly did ruin him. The hotel has never

been quite the same since. We have to put up with a great deal of Anglo-French cooking now—the worst of England and the least of France."

"But why did he marry her?" I demanded. "And why does he look as if he were just about to be electrocuted?"

"I haven't finished the story yet," he replied.

"Well, why not finish it?" I suggested.

III

"The reputation of the 'Belmont' began to dwindle," he went on. "The manager, in despair, searched all over the country for a cook who might be nearly as good as Peden's, but he utterly failed to find one. The directors held a special meeting to consider the situation, but they spent most of their time in denouncing Peden, so very little was achieved by it. Then the manager's wife took a hand in the game. She went straight to the cook and asked her what her terms were to come back. The cook refused to say. She was very happy in the new house which Peden had built for her,—really, it came to that,—and she had no wish to change her quarters. She was sorry to hear that the 'Belmont' was doing so badly, but, after all, she had not been put into this world merely for the purpose of saving the 'Belmont' from bankruptcy. Mrs. Jordan went away baffled. She met the chairman of the board of directors soon after she had left Peden's back door, and she suddenly put it to him that he ought to empower her to offer the cook a pound a week more than

Peden was paying her, whatever it might be; and the chairman, in a fit of desperation, consented.

"'Give her anything she asks,' was his parting word to Mrs. Jordan, who immediately went back to Peden's kitchen and put the proposition before the cook.

"'A pound a week more than he is giving you, whatever it is!' she said.

"The cook hesitated for a moment or two, during which she glanced round her very nice kitchen, and then shrugged her shoulders, and said she had no wish to change. The manager's wife had observed the glance round the kitchen, and suddenly her woman's intuition made her realize what it was that so attracted the cook to Peden's house. It was the comfort of the kitchen and the little sitting-room, which was hers! She remembered the kitchen of the 'Belmont' Hotel, a comfortless, hot, and sometimes overcrowded place, and knew that it was useless to expect the cook to exchange her new kitchen for that one. She turned away, feeling that no advantage would be gained by staying; but before she got to the door she remembered the chairman of the board of directors had said, 'Give her anything she asks.' She would! Impulsively, she turned to the cook, and in a great hurry (for she was afraid, as she told me afterwards, to stop to think) offered her a pound a week more than Peden was giving her, and a suite of rooms in the hotel for herself: a bedroom, a sitting-room, and, crowning glory, a bath-room. That offer completely knocked the cook. Never in her wildest imaginings had she dreamed of possessing a private

suite in a hotel. She gave one gasp, and then collapsed into the comfortable arm-chair which Peden had provided for her. When she had recovered her wits and her breath, she sat bolt upright and stared at the manager's wife.

"'Do you mean it?' she demanded.

"Mrs. Jordan had begun by this time to feel some tremors. After all, she had no authority to go about the place offering private suites to cooks. But she screwed up her courage and swore that she meant every word she had said. The effect was magical. The cook bounced out of her arm-chair as if she had been blown out of it.

"'I'll give him notice now,' she said, making for the door which led to Peden's part of the house.

"But there was no need for her to go to him. At that moment he came to her to ascertain what there was to be for lunch.

"'Ah, Cook,' he said gleefully before he observed that Mrs. Jordan was present, 'and what have you got for me to-day?'

"'Me month's notice,' said the cook.

"Peden's jaw dropped.

"'Goo' Gaw!' he gurgled, unable to articulate clearly. 'Whayamean?'

"'I mean what I say,' said the cook. 'I'm givin' a month's notice. I'm goin' back to the "Belmont".'

"'Whaffor?' he choked. Then he saw the manager's wife, and a frightful fury possessed him. She was smiling the most triumphant smile that has ever been seen on a human face. Something exploded in poor Peden's

brain, and he literally yelled at her: 'Geddoud! Geddoud of my house!'

"Mrs. Jordan stood up at once, smiling amiably at him.

" 'Certainly,' she said. 'I was just about to go when you came in, and I thought I'd wait until you'd heard the news!'

" 'Geddoud!' shrieked Peden.

"And with another nice smile and a flick of her skirt, the manager's wife departed."

IV

"By this time, of course, the news of the great war between Peden and the 'Belmont' had spread all over the neighbourhood. The heavy defeat of the former by the manager's wife created a terrific sensation, although some people said that her victory, like most modern victories, was too dearly purchased. 'The next thing that cook'll want'll be her own motor-car and chauffeur!' said one bitter-minded cynic. The wives of retired Anglo-Indians went about asking one another what the world was coming to, and sighing for the good old days in India, when servants *were* servants and not pampered autocrats. Major Glendinning seriously thought of sending a letter to *The Times* proposing a revival of the feudal system, and was, in fact, only prevented from doing so by the knowledge that *The Times* would not print it. Feeling in the town was sharp and bitterly divided. Some were inclined to think that Peden had been scurvily treated, although they admitted that he had begun the scurvy behaviour.

Major Glendinning, who, in addition to being in favour of medievalism, corporal punishment, the firm hand, and the feudal system, was strongly opposed to all manifestations of feminism, declared that no man would have been guilty of the trick by which the manager's wife had induced the cook to give Peden notice. '*That,*' said he, "is what comes of giving votes to women! You'll get *that* sort of thing going on in Parliament when they're a bit stronger.' He actually wrote a letter on this subject to *The Times,* and, when *The Times* politely returned it, he sent it to the Colemouth *Observer,* in which it was printed because the proprietor printed anything that he got for nothing and was likely to sell at least one more copy of the paper. Some of the inhabitants of Colemouth began to make bets about the cook. A man called Sloan had publicly asserted that in his opinion the matter was not yet ended. He said, with an impressive air of mystery, 'She's not back at the "Belmont" yet!' and he said it so many times that people began to wonder whether she would ever go back to it. This state of doubt was increased when Tom Meldon, irritated by the repetition of 'She's not back at the "Belmont" yet,' offered to squander his means in a bet on the subject. 'I'll bet you a bob she goes back!' he said, and one could detect a note of recklessness in his voice as he made the offer.

" 'Done!' said Sloan, and the bet was made.

"The readiness with which Sloan accepted the bet unnerved Meldon, but he could not decently back out of it, and so with an air of bravado he offered to double

it. Sloan, however, said that he was content. He was prepared to support his word, but he was not prepared to be a plunger and ruin his chances of eternal felicity by gambling. Other bets were made, and by the end of the week a large part of the population of Colemouth had money on the cook. I suspect, too, that some attempts were made to induce her to behave in an underhand and unsportsmanlike manner, but these attempts were hopeless failures.

"For the whole of the first week after he had been given notice, Peden went about with a face as long as the day and the morrow. I will not say that he lost his interest in food, for Peden was the sort of man who would eat a hearty breakfast on the morning of his execution, but I *will* say that if he could have called down fire and brimstone from heaven, nothing would have saved the 'Belmont' or the manager's wife from being burned to ashes. He tried to persuade the cook to withdraw her notice, to the extent even of working on her feelings by pretending to be consumptive; but she had set her heart on that private suite, and Peden might as well have talked to the moon and asked it not to interfere with the tides as try to dissuade her from returning to the 'Belmont.' He began to realize this, realized that it was not the money she wanted, but the luxury of the suite, and although this realization would seem likely to have rendered him hopeless, it had precisely the opposite effect: it *gave* him hope. If only he could find some means of providing her with greater grandeur than the 'Belmont' was offering her, he might retain his cook. He would sit on the promenade, rack-

ing his brains, and one day, as I passed him, it seemed to me that his face, for the first time since she had given him notice, looked cheerful.

"'Thought of anything?' I said, for of course we all knew what was occupying his mind.

"'That's my business,' he replied in that bright and cheery manner which livens up parties.

"'Ah, well,' I retorted, endeavouring to brighten his life a little, 'it won't be long now before we have your cook at the "Belmont." When I think of the meals we shall have! You'll have to come and dine with me one night——'

"He gave the loudest snort that I have ever heard from a human being, and jumped out of his seat. For a moment or two I imagined that he was about to assault me, but instead he laughed in my face.

"'It'll be a very long time before she goes back to the "Belmont"!' he said, and as he spoke I saw a look of resolution in his eyes. He had made up his mind about something. And he had. The next day I saw him getting into the London train.

"'Hillo!' I said, 'running away?'

"He leaned out of the window and addressed me in slow, clear tones.

"'You know,' he said, 'if you aren't careful, you'll end your days in an asylum for idiots!'

"Then the train moved off. If it hadn't, I should have assaulted him. Two days later the cook caught the London train. When this fact became known, there was intense excitement in Colemouth, and the manager and his wife nearly had a nervous breakdown between

them. A week later Peden and the cook returned together.

"'Let me introduce you to my wife,' he said to the chairman of the board of directors, who happened to be on the platform when they got out of the carriage. But the chairman of the board of directors was not in a fit state to be introduced to anyone."

"So he kept his cook, after all," I said. "It was rather a drastic way, though."

"Oh, very."

"However, he could count on having his meals well cooked for the rest of their lives. By the way, why does he look as if he were suffering from acute dyspepsia?"

My neighbour looked up with a grin on his face.

"For a very good reason," he said. "Because he's *got* acute dyspepsia."

"Got it! But——"

"My friend, that's the tragedy. The moment he married her, she refused to do any more cooking. She wanted to lead the life of a society lady. That craving for the private suite ought to have been a warning to him. What was the good of being Peden's wife and mistress of the handsomest house in Colemouth if she had to do the cooking? She wanted to walk up and down the promenade in the morning, just like all the other ladies, and sit in the drawing-room in an evening frock after dinner, and she couldn't do that and cook, so she stopped cooking. The first thing she did on the morning after they got back to Colemouth was to go down to the registry-office and engage a girl to come

in and do the cooking for her. And what a cook that girl was! She ought to have been prosecuted by the police for maltreating food. Mrs. Peden was all right, —she could eat anything,—but poor old Peden—no, he's not a happy man. I feel sorry for him, although, mind you, it served him right. He was greedy and selfish and unwilling to share a good thing, and so he lost it. It's the old story of the dog with the bone crossing the river—that's what it is! The 'Belmont' got over its blow, although the Jordans left the country; but Peden will never get over his."

THE REVELATION

I FOUND him sitting on the edge of Romney Marsh, on the side of the road from Hythe to Dymchurch, where the shooting ranges are. He was repairing one of his boots in an extraordinarily complex manner: pieces of string seemed to be the chief element in the process. It was a very hot day; the sky was unclouded; and the road from Hythe to Dymchurch is shelterless. I was tired and overheated, so I sat down in the shadow of the bracken beside him. He agreed that the weather was hot, and that it was a long time since we had had weather so hot. He agreed also that the farmers would be in a difficult position if the drought continued; the burnt-up state of the fields did not indicate great stores of fodder. Still, it couldn't be helped, and if it were hard on farmers, it was good for other people. Not much good to him, though; tramping was *not* a joy on a scorching, dusty day, particularly when your boots weren't of the best.

"Not much of a game, at any time, is it?" I asked, passing the cigarettes.

"Like everything else," he said, lighting up; "has its bad points as well as its good!"

"Aimless sort of life," I suggested.

"Oh, I dunno! Not any worse than anything else!"

"Surely!" I exclaimed, in the Smilesian manner, "a

man gets some satisfaction out of life when he feels he has done his share of the world's work!"

"P'raps," he said, non-committally, and then lapsed into silence.

A small squad of soldiers, returning to barracks from shooting at the targets, went by, red and weary; their tunics were open at the throat, and some of them had pushed their caps back on their heads so that what breeze there was might cool their brows. A motor-car came speedily from Hythe, throwing up clouds of dust as it went by, and in its train came a light cart, laden with trunks and children and a tired-looking woman.

"You know," said the tramp, suddenly, "I used to be respectable, and earn my living!"

I murmured vaguely, and he proceeded.

"Twenty years I was with one firm!" he said.

"Twenty years!"

"Yes, ever since I left school till I gave it up!"

"Twenty years is a long time! It seems odd you should go on the tramp after service like that!"

"It does seem funny, doesn't it! I often wonder at myself when I think of it!" He looked quizzically at me for a moment, and then said, "You know, you *do* do funny things now and then, don't you?"

I nodded.

"You don't know why you do it! Can't account for it, nohow. You just do it!"

I said that I should have thought that a steady man, with a record of twenty years' good service in one firm, would have little difficulty in getting fresh employment.

"Yes," he said, "p'raps you're right; only somehow I don't want a job!" I shrugged my shoulders. "No," he continued, quite without asperity in his voice. "No, I'm not a lazy chap. I was up at four this morning, and I've walked from Rye! . . . That's a good step on a day like this! No, it isn't that! I don't think a job's good enough!"

I asked him to explain, adding some foolishness about the dignity of labour, which I am afraid amused rather than inspired him. I detected that from the expression in his eyes. He did not say anything to indicate that he thought I was babbling nonsense. His manner was quiet and gentle and courteous, as though he found life so odd that he could not lose his temper about it, or be boorish even to those who were boorish to him.

"I used to think that," he said, simply, "and p'raps it's true. Only I didn't think so the day I gave it up, and I don't think so now. I don't suppose I ever shall!"

"Why did you give it up?" I asked.

"I often wonder about that myself! You see, it was like this! I was employed in a warehouse. Went there as a lad to run errands, and worked my way up to porter. I was getting twenty-three bob a week, and I worked from six in the morning till six at night!"

"Pretty long hours," I admitted.

"Oh, I dunno. There's lots worse than that."

"Of course," I said, "it was a regular job, and you were pretty safe, I suppose. Not like those poor devils of casual labourers!"

"That's true enough! I often thought that myself. My wife thought I was one of the lucky ones!"

"Dead, I suppose?"

"No, not that I know of!"

"You mean! . . ."

"Deserted her, yes!"

"You don't expect me to admire you, do you?"

"No. We had four youngsters, but two of them died. Consumption!"

"And what happened to the other two?"

"I don't know. She looked after them, I s'pose. She was a good sort of woman, you know. I often think that. I s'pose I did wrong by her!"

"You're a pretty bad lot," I said, with some disgust.

"Yes, I s'pose some people would think that. P'raps I am, only somehow—well, it's hard to tell, isn't it?"

I said that the matter was clear enough to me.

"Yes, I know," he said, "but you have to be a thing before you can understand it properly. That's what I think!"

"But why," I said, urgently, "did you throw up everything and take to this sort of life?"

"Well, that's just what's so hard to explain. You see, I'm a steady sort of chap as a rule. I don't drink, or anything of that sort! . . . I can't help wondering why I did it, and I can't make out why I don't go back again. That's what beats me. I often think of my wife, only somehow she don't seem to belong to me! You know! It's like as if I was looking in somewhere, and she was inside and I was out, and . . . Well, I suppose it's how the dead thinks of the living. Can't feel the

same about 'em somehow, as they did when they was alive. It's odd, you know!"

I saw that he was in the mood for speculation, and I allowed him to ramble on without interruption.

"I went down to the warehouse one day just the same as I always did. Caught a workman's tram and got there as usual. There wasn't anything special about the day. Just an ordinary day. I had my dinner in my pocket, wrapped up in a bit of newspaper. I remember it just the same's it was yesterday. Some bread and a cold sausage, and I meant to buy a cup of cocoa at a shop near the warehouse. There was a chap sitting beside me in the tram, reading a paper, and he said to me, 'This Smelton case is a bit 'ot, isn't it?' and I nodded my head, and said, 'Yes, it is,' and he said something else which I forgot, and then he got off the tram, and I followed him. I don't remember rightly what happened after that, but I can recollect having my dinner, and saying to myself, 'Not much of a meal this for a man!' And it wasn't, you know! Bread and cold sausage! Of course, she couldn't help it! Probably didn't have anything at all herself! . . . And then I suddenly felt what a silly game it all was. 'Fancy,' says I to myself, 'slogging at it like this twelve hours every day for twenty-three bob a week!' Bread and cold sausage! Twenty years I'd been at it, mind you, and that was all I was getting. And no chance of getting any more. That was what knocked me over! I might go on working another twenty years and be no better off at the end of them than I was then. No prospects! Every day the same! Six to six! Twenty-three bob a

week. Bread and cold sausage. 'God,' said I, 'what a life! . . .' And then I just gave up! I went and drew my money—it was pay-day—and I cleared off. I sent half of it to her, and said I wasn't coming back again. *I was fed up!*"

He got up from the grass and collected his goods.

"And that's how it was," he said, standing in front of me, and looking like one who seeks for explanations of things which cannot be explained. "It just came over me like that, and I can't make it out, and I don't suppose I ever shall. It's funny, you know, that's what it is; but funny things do happen sometimes."

THE FOOL

The Englishman came up the old, ascending road that leads from Ballyshannon to the townlands of Rossnowlagh and Belalt, and where it reaches its height and begins to dip again, he paused for a while before a gap in the hedge to look down on the sea that lay before him like a great shining thing. To his right was Donegal Bay, and in the heart of it was the bright splash of white light that sailors call "the silver streak"; to his left was the salmon leap fronting Ballyshannon, and beyond that, distant and misty, the black hills of Sligo pierced the clouds and were lost. Below him, sitting on the earth, was John O'Moyle.

"Good-morning, Pat!" exclaimed the Englishman.

"Me name's not Pat," replied O'Moyle; "it's John O'Moyle, o' the town o' Ballyshannon since ivir A wus born!"

The Englishman smiled. "I thought all you fellows were called Pat!" he said.

"Aw, indade, there's manny in the wurl' like you, God help ye!" It was plain that the man was out of his wits, so the English tourist forbore to be angry. "It's a brave sort o' a day!" continued O'Moyle.

"Very fine, indeed—very fine!"

"It's like the shinin' hosts o' heaven, the day! Wi' the sun shinin' on the watter, an' all!"

"Yes, yes! . . ."

"D'ye see thon white light on the sea?" said the witless man, pointing to the silver streak on Donegal Bay. The Englishman nodded. "It's the ladder that the angels come down thrum Heaven on t' Jacob that wus slapin' at the fut o' it wondherin' how much he'd be gettin' at the market fur Laban's sheep!"

"That's a quaint fancy! . . ."

"Eh! It's no fancy, but the God's truth! Are ye goin' far?"

The Englishman explained that he was walking over to Rossnowlagh, that he proposed to lunch there, and then walk on to the town of Donegal. Nine Irish miles it was, he understood, from Rossnowlagh to Donegal.

"It is that, iv'ry inch o' it! Sure, it's the long walk, but the railway runs there, an' if ye've anny money ye can travel be train. Mebbe ye're a traveller?"

"I prefer to walk," said the Englishman, ignoring the inquiry concerning his occupation.

"It's a quare thing t' want t' be walkin' whin ye have the money t' ride! Ye're not doin' it for fun, are ye?"

"That's just what I am doing it for!" and the Englishman laughed.

"Well, A declare! Ye're an Englishman, aren't ye?"

"I am," said the traveller, with quiet pride.

"Ay, A thought as much!"

The Englishman looked about him, observing the ill condition of the fields. "It's a poor sort of a country this, isn't it?" he said.

"Aw, it cud be worse, an' it cud be better. God

made it, an' ye can't grum'le! There's better lan' on the road t' Donegal, but sure the Prodesans has it all. The like o' lan' like that is all that Cathliks can git!"

"Well, now," said the Englishman, "don't you think that that's a strange thing? The Protestants are prosperous and the Catholics aren't!"

"It's not strange at all. If ye wur a Cathlik an' yer great-gran'father was hanged fur a rebel, an' his brother that wus a holy priest wus shot dead be sodgers in a glen fur sayin' a mass, an' ye wur driven thrum wan place til another, an' the lan' that wus in yer fam'ly thrum the time o' Red Hugh O'Neill wus tuk thrum ye by a damned oul' scoundrel called Crumwill an' give til strangers thrum over the sea, wud ye be much better aff nor us, Prodesan or no Prodesan?"

"Oh, of course!" exclaimed the Englishman. "Historical reasons, and so forth, no doubt! But—of course, I don't want to hurt your feelings—you quite understand!—but really, you know, the Catholics in Ireland are a shiftless lot. I've been here a week now! . . ."

"It's a long time whin ye come t' think o' it!"

"I don't pretend to have formed an expert opinion on the subject, but so many men in Ireland seem to lounge through life. They've no energy, no go, no hustle in them! You, for instance; what is a fine, healthy-looking fellow like you doing lounging about in a field like this? Isn't there any work you can do?"

John O'Moyle, being a half-wit, stood up in the field and gazed at the Englishman standing above him in the break in the hedge. "What would I be workin' fur?" he demanded.

"Every man ought to work! It's—it's only decent. Besides, people are happier that work!"

O'Moyle climbed up the earth bank, and stood beside the Englishman. "Do you see thon wee man wi' the black hair in the fiel' ayont?" he said, pointing to where a peasant was spraying potatoes—a frail, hairy man, with a tank containing disinfectant strapped to his back. The Englishman nodded.

"Thon's Jimmy M'Givern!" continued John O'Moyle. "Thon's his fiel'. He got it in the Lan' Purchase! He has a bit more, too. He's a man o' propirty, is Jimmy M'Givern! He works hard, very hard! He's up at five an' sometimes earlier iv'ry day, an' he works thrum the dawn o' day t' the dark o' night, an' hardly ivir staps. Ay, he's a hard worker is Jimmy M'Givern! Workin', workin' all the time, bendin' over purties, an' mebbe whin he's not lukkin' the blight comes in aff the sea wan night an' destroys the crap entirely!"

"Ah, but there's the thrill of working his own land! It's his own, you say—he got it from the Land Purchase Commissioners!"

"Ay, it'll be his if he lives long enough. At the end of seventy-two years, when he's paid aff the instalments, it'll be his!" John was silent for a moment. He stood watching the bent figure as it went up and down the rows of potatoes, spraying them lest the blight should get at them and turn them black while he slept. Then he laughed. "Mebbe ye're right, sir!" he added. "But A'm thinking A'd rather be a fool nor be Jimmy M'Givern! A git up whin A like, an' A beg a crust o' bread fur the love o' God, an' a sup o' drink!

An' A come out an' luk at the sea, wi' the sun in me face an' the win' blowin' in me hair! . . ."

The Englishman moved on. He began to fear that he would be late for luncheon. He nodded to John and passed on. Where the road bends slightly there is a cottage, and he stopped to ask for a drink of water. An old woman gave him to drink. Looking up the road he saw John O'Moyle standing regarding the figure of Jimmy M'Givern. He thanked the old woman and, pointing to John, said: "He's a queer sort of chap, isn't he?"

"Is it John O'Moyle ye mane?" she replied. "Aw, sure, ye needen bother yer head about him! He's astray in his mind, God help him!"

CRISIS

Mr. 'Enry Martin walked smartly up the Walworth Road in the manner befitting a man who has not long been married and who is eager to get home to his wife on a fine Saturday afternoon. He imagined to himself a meal with Aggie, a little smoke, and then a stroll up the Camberwell Road to Ruskin Park, and a lazy lounge during the afternoon, watching the boys at cricket or the stupid old gentlemen playing bowls, a game which seemed to Mr. 'Enry Martin to be profoundly silly. He was prepared to admit, if pressed on the point, that no doubt it suited some people, and that, as likely as not, they enjoyed it; but he thought it was a poor game, fit only for females and fat old men. Nevertheless, he liked to sit and look at the players as they rolled the bowls over the well-cut grass. Aggie liked the tennis-players best of all, her affection for them being derived from the novelettes; it appeared that all the Really Nice People played tennis with great grace. Such was the afternoon that Mr. 'Enry Martin anticipated for himself and his wife. Such had been the Saturday afternoons, on the whole, that they had spent together since their marriage. . . .

If it was an eager, pleased 'Enry Martin that went into No. 5 Jordan Grove on that warm day, it was a

puzzled, vaguely angry 'Enry Martin that came out again later on; not only was it a puzzled 'Enry Martin that came out of the house, but it was a lonely 'Enry Martin, for Aggie, for the first time for six months, remained behind. He walked slowly up the Grove towards the main road, looking very much like a man who has been violently punched on the head, but is unable to say why he has been punched, or by whom. Where the Grove joins the Walworth Road he met George Halliday, whom every one calls Ole George, for no particular reason.

"'Illoa, 'Enry!" exclaimed Ole George, as he came up to 'Enry, and 'Enry moodily replied, "'loa!"

"Nah, nah!" said Ole George, "down't look so bloomin' merry, ole chap! I can't stand it, reely, I can't! It 'urts me to laugh! . . ."

"Ow, chuck it, for 'eaven's sike!" was all that 'Enry replied to Ole George's flow of sarcasm.

"Bit upset, ain't you?" inquired Ole George.

"So'd you be if you was me!"

"Ow! 'Ow's that?"

"Down't knaow wot's the matter with Aggie! Fair snapped the 'ead off me, she did. Never seen her like it before. 'Ope she ain't goin' to be like it alwis!"

"W'y, wot's the matter?"

"I down't knaow! As soon as I got in, I could see somethink was wrong. Cryin' she was, an' didden knaow wot she was cryin' for. 'Wot's up, ole girl?' ses I. 'Nothink,' ses she. 'Ow,' ses I, like that, 'well, I shouldn't mike so much fuss abaht it if I was you!' 'Wouldn't you?' ses she. 'Naow,' ses I. 'I wouldn't!' An' then I

ses, 'Wot's for dinner?' ''Ash!' ses she. ''Ash!' ses I, 'I 'ate 'ash!' 'It's all you'll git,' ses she, 'an' chance it!' The place didden look the same, some'ow. Clean enough, you knaow, on'y it didden look as if 'er 'eart was in it. You knaow!"

Ole George nodded sagely, and 'Enry continued his tale of woe.

"Never said a word, she didden, w'ile we was 'avin' it, neither, but kept on lookin' misable! You knaow! 'Umpified! 'Comin' out,' ses I, w'en we'd cleared awy the dishes, 'Naow,' she ses, short-like. 'Ow, awright,' ses I, 'be nasty abaht it, on'y don't sy I didden ast ye!' 'Down't wanna gow aht,' ses she. An' then I fair lost me temper, an' talked strite til her. 'Look 'ere,' I ses, 'wot's the little gime, eih? Wod you gettin' at, eih?' An' so 'elp me, she started cryin' as 'ard as she could, an' that fair unnerved me, an' I put me arms roun' 'er, an' I ses, 'Look 'ere, ole girl, wot's up any'ow? Anyone bin annoyin' of you?' She started to blubber worse'n ever, an' 'ung on til me, an' kep' on syin' she didden mean no 'arm, an' she'd be awright bymeby, an' she didden knaow wot was up with 'er. 'Tired-like,' she ses. 'I'll lie down for 'alf-a-nour, an' then I be awright! You go on aht an' let me be quiet,' she ses. An' 'ere I am. Rummy go, I call it!"

Ole George took him by the arm and led him into the "Sir William Walworth." He demanded that the young person behind the bar should supply him and his friend with two glasses of beer, and quick abaht it, see!

"You knaow," he said, when they had taken their

first drink of the beer, and had solemnly said, "'Ere's lookin' *to*-wards you!"; "you knaow, you oughta be in a Nome, you ought!"

"'Ow du mean?" exclaimed 'Enry.

"'Ow do I mean! Ain't you got no bloomin' gumption?" He leant over and tapped 'Enry on the shoulder. "Cheps like you," he continued, "oughtn't t' be allowed t' git married! Down't knaow nothink!"

'Enry gazed at Ole George indignantly. "Strikes me," he said, "as 'ow you got somethink wrong with you, too. Talkin' like that ter a chap! Wod you mean by it, eih?"

"Ain't you got no understandin'? Ain't you never 'eard of nothink?"

"'Eard of wot?"

Ole George became so sarcastic that he could scarcely contain himself. "'Eard of wot!" he mimicked 'Enry. "W'y wot the 'ole bloomin' world 'as 'eard of, exceptin' you!"

'Enry still looked blankly in front of him. "I dunno wot you're drivin' at," he said. "Off your 'ead wot I can see of it!"

Ole George implored him to say where he had been born and brought up, and ended by assuring him that the 'eathen in 'is blindness knew more about things than 'Enry apparently did.

"Well, wot's it all abaht, then?" said 'Enry impatiently. "It ain't my fault I down't know nothink. W'y down't you tell me wot it is, 'stead o' callin' me aht me nime?"

Ole George called for two more beers, and quick

about it too, miss, or you'll 'ear more'n you'll like, see! And, when he was served, he leant over and said, in a very solemn whisper, "'Enry, my boy, it's my belief as 'ow you're goin' ter do your dooty by the Stite!"

"'Ow du mean?"

"Nah, look 'ere, 'Enry, wot does doin' your dooty be the Stite mean? Wot's eddication for if you down't knaow thet, yet? You're going ter be a nappy fawther, my boy, thet's wot you're goin' to be. Absolute!"

"Wot?"

"A nappy fawther, my boy!"

'Enry stood up straight, and caught hold of Ole George by the coat. "Wod you sy?" he repeated vacantly.

"Wot I 'ave said, I 'ave said," replied Ole George. "You didden ought t' be allowed t' be one be rights, not a chep thet down't knaow nothink didden!"

"So 'elp me!" exclaimed 'Enry.

"Bit of a oner, ain't it, eih?"

"Fency me! . . . Look 'ere, George, it's all right, ain't it? No 'ank, I mean!"

"'Ank!" said Ole George. "Of course it ain't 'ank. W'en you're my age, my boy, you'll knaow it ain't a subject you can 'ank abaht!"

"I can't 'ardly realize it! . . . Of course, I knoo somethink 'ud 'appen some dy, but I never thought abaht it rightly. You knaow!" Ole George nodded sympathetically. "Absolute knock-aht, it is," continued 'Enry. "Mikes you think, it do. Fair pulls you up. So 'elp me!" He gazed at the beer in an abstracted fash-

ion, and then raised the glass to his lips, but set it down again without drinking. "I better be gettin' 'ome," he said, "an' see after 'er!"

"She be awright," replied Ole George. "Much better leave 'er alone. They likes t' be quiet at first. Funny things, women!"

"Wot I can't git owver is me bein' a fawther, y' knaow! Mikes ye feel funny, down't it? Of course, you're used to it, nah! . . ."

"Never git used t' it," declared Ole George. "We've 'ad six, an' the last knocked me all of a neap jus' as much as the first. Never git used ter thet, you down't!"

They finished the beer in silence, and then rose and went out of the public-house, and walked in the direction of home. There was a great noisy crowd in the street, and the harsh voices of the costermongers, crying their wares, came floating through the air. A blind man monotonously cried for pity on his condition, and an old woman turned the handle of a dismal barrel-organ. The street was hot, and reeking with the smell of overcrowded humans. All the noise of the world seemed concentrated in that one street. "Goo' God!" 'Enry murmured to himself, his temples throbbing. "W'y cahn't they shut their silly rah!"

"You be awright!" said Ole George.

"Didden ought to 'ave said wot I did to 'er!"

"She'll forget abaht it awright! . . ."

They went through the crowd as though it were not there.

"Goo'-night, ole man!" said Ole George, as they separated.

"Goo'-night, George!" was 'Enry's reply.

"She be awright presently," Ole George assured him, and left him.

He walked down the street like a man dazed. "Absolute knock-aht," he said, and then added, "So 'elp me!" He stood about the door of the house for a few minutes as if he were afraid to enter. "Upsets a chep, this sort o' thing!" he muttered as he entered the house. "You awright, Aggie?" he said softly, and she said that she was a little better.

"Like a cup o' tea?" he asked, preparing to lay the table.

"Thenk you, 'Enry."

He bustled about the room, preparing for the meal. "I tell you wot," he said. "You better stop in bed ter-morrer, an' I'll mike the breakfast! You see if I don't! I'm sorry I was nasty t' you t'-dy!"

She smiled at him, and assured him that it was all right. "You weren't reely nasty," she said, "it was me! . . ."

"Ow, naow, it weren't! . . . See 'ere, Aggie, I tell you wot. We'll 'ave 'ash ter-morrer for dinner if you like, eih? Or anythink you like, on'y down't you put yourself aht, see! I do thet awright. You lie still an' 'ave a rest." He came close to her, and put his arms about her, and pressed her closely to him. "So 'elp me, Aggie," he said, "I'm sorry I jawred you, I am, strite!"

"It's awright, 'Enry," she replied. "You didden mean no 'arm!"

THE MATCH

Michael Halloran sat on a bank where the road bends round Sheegus Height.

"Aw, now," said he, "but it's the sorraful wurl' when a fine young fella like meself has to lave his country an' go til a strange lan' fur to earn a livin'!"

"It is that," replied Conn Maguire.

"An' me willin' an' able til work, an' not a han's turn can I git til do. It's not right!"

"It is not."

The old man looked at the young man swiftly, and then turned away and looked out over the sea to where the Sligo mountains rise black and mistily to the sky.

"You wurn't wantin' to be goin', I'd be thinkin'?" he suggested.

"It's not me that 'ud go, if I cud help it. But sure, there's nathin' fur me here. I've no lan' or nathin'."

"An' what wud ye do fur a bit o' lan', Michael Halloran?"

"Sure, I'd run thrum here til Barnes Gap on me han's an' knees widhout stappin', I'd be that eager til get it!"

The old man turned and looked at Michael as he spoke. "Wud ye marry me daughter Ellen?" he demanded.

Michael looked up at him in astonishment, and then laughed boisterously.

"Is it makin' fun o' me ye are?" he said.

"I am not," replied Conn.

Michael rose to his feet and crossed to the old man's side. "It's a quare wurl'," he said, "an' the quare people in it!"

"I'll not be stingy," said Conn.

"Ye'd need not to be. Sure, yer daughter's no catch, Conn Maguire. She is not in sowl!"

"I'll give three cows til the man that marries her."

"They'd be well earned!"

"Will ye take her if I give ye three cows wi' her?"

"Aw, the cows are all right. It's the wumman! She's oulder nor I am, an' she has the quare bad temper on her."

Conn made a gesture of contempt. "Och," said he, "wud a fine young fella like yerself let a wumman put him out? You're the lad cud control her well. Wuddn't ye give her a clout on the ear if she was imperent?"

"Aw, she's brave and handy wi' her fists herself. I saw her knock John Tanner flat on his back wance wi' wan blow. She's strong! . . ."

"An' if she is, sure she's all the better able to help a man wi' a bit o' lan'. It's the fine worker she is, an' the quare han' wi' cows. There's none o' yer fine wimmen thrum the towns that cud houl' a candle to her wi' cows."

Michael shifted about a little, and then stooped and picked up a stone, which he flung carelessly at nothing

in particular. "If a fella had three cows," he said, "he'd want a bit o' lan' til graze them on."

"Mebbe," replied Conn, "he cud sell wan o' the cows an' get a bit o' lan' out o' the Lan' Purchase."

Michael smiled cunningly. "Naw," he said, "he'd want til have three cows—he wudden want til sell any o' them for a while anyway. It's a bit o' lan' he'd be wantin' as well as three cows."

"Mebbe he cud borry a bit o' lan' at a low rent. Mebbe," went on Conn, "I'd be willin' til let him have the lend o' me medda beyant Harrison's farm fur a while."

Michael shook his head. "He'd be wantin' the lan' fur himself," he said, "an' wudden want til be beholdin til no wan."

Conn moralized. "It's not well for a young fella til be full o' pride," he said.

"Cows must have grass," replied Michael, "an' ye can't have grass if ye haven't got lan'. Yer daughter's no match be herself fur the like o' me."

They stood for a little while without speaking, the young man flicking the grass with his foot, the old man looking out over the sea and calculating in his mind how best to secure a husband for his daughter at a small price.

"Ye're very hard," he said in a tone which was intended to flatter the young man on his possession of a keen sense of business.

"I'm not hard," replied Michael, not displeased, "but ye'd need til git up brave an' early in the mornin' til git the better o' me."

"I'll give ye the three cows an' ye can graze them on the medda fur a year fur nathin' . . ."

"I wudden take her at the price!"

The old man turned to go up the road as though all the bargaining were at an end. "Aw, well," he said, "I can't do better nor that, an' if ye don't like me terms ye'll have til go to America." He moved away a little. "It'll be a quare pity fur a fine young fella like you to have to go to a foreign lan' when there's a chance fur ye in yer own country."

"That's what I'm thinkin' meself."

"An' the chance when I'm dead o' steppin' intil me place."

"Sure, ye'll live a long time, Conn. Ye're a long-lived family. Yer ould mother's not dead yet, let alone you."

"Aw, ye nivir know!"

"Naw, ye don't, an' ye shudden take no chances."

"I'll make me will the morra mornin', lavin' ivrything til you an' Ellen."

"Ye cud make another wan the day after."

"Aw, I wudden do that."

Michael kicked the life out of a dandelion. "Conn Maguire," said he emphatically, "if ye want til marry yer daughter til as fine a young fella as there is in this or anny other townlan' in the county Donegal, ye'll have to give me the three cows an' the medda beyant Harrison's farm. I cuddn't marry her fur less. God knows she's the sore wumman til look at, an' the temper o' her is enough til drive a man til the asylum. I'll be goin' til the shippin' agent's at Ballyshannon

the morra mornin' til make arrangements fur me passage til America, an' I'd like til know now what yer intentions are. I wun't take her fur less."

"Ye'll be sure an' have her? Ye wun't back out of it?"

"Aw, I'll take her all right. Sure, wan wumman's as good as another if it comes to that, an' a wumman wi' cattle an' lan' is better nor one wi' nathin'!"

"Ye're a hard man," sighed Conn, "but I'll do what ye want. Will ye come wi' me now an' see Ellen?"

"Aw, sure there's time enough fur that."

"Mebbe, she'd like ye to come and see her. Ye nivir know wi' wimmen!"

"Man, ye must be quare an' anxious til git rid o' her," said Michael.

"Aw, indade, I'm not," replied Conn hurriedly. "Aw, no, I'm not. It wus herself made the suggestion. She wanted a man, she said, fur she's tired o' bein' an ould maid an' seein' all the young girls o' the place married aff an' no wan comin' anear her til ax her til do the same. 'There's young Michael Halloran,' ses she, 'that hasn't got much wit, God help him, but's a fine strappin' young fella! . . . It's aff til America he'll be soon if ye don't stap him. Affer him the three cows,' she said, 'an' he'll have me, the same young fella.' That wus what she said herself. It's not wantin' til git rid o' her that I am, but it's herself's wantin' til be married, an' God knows that's nacherl enough fur a wumman."

"Mebbe it is," said Michael.

"Ye'd better come an' see her," urged Conn.

"Aw, I'll not come now. Sure, there's no hurry. I want til have a bit o' dandher til meself. Tell her I'll come roun' the night an' coort her."

DERELICTS

A MAID came to the door and blew a cab whistle sharply; and Ole George whipped up his horse and started off.

"Ain't no good you goin'!" said the crossing-sweeper. "She on'y blew once. It's a taxi she wants."

"I s'pose I can 'eng about if I like, funny!" retorted Ole George.

The crossing-sweeper shook his head. "Not much good doin' that," he said. "A taxi's sure to come up. On'y make you bad-tempered again, you know."

Ole George drove off to "'eng" about in the hope that, should a taxi-cab not turn up soon, the would-be passenger would tire of waiting and would hire his "growler." "No 'arm in tryin', is there?" he exclaimed, as the dilapidated horse made an effort to canter. Before he had reached the end of the street a taxi-cab, smart and clean, came quickly round the corner and took up the man and woman waiting on the steps of the house where the maid had blown the whistle. Ole George pulled up sharply, with a sick look on his face. "Blast you!" he said to the driver as the taxi-cab went by.

"Go 'ome an' die!" was the reply he received.

"I tole you wot would 'appen," said the crossing-sweeper when Ole George returned to the stand. "It ain't no good you goin' . . ."

"I don't want no good advice, if you please. Not from you nor no one else!"

"Well, I was on'y sayin' . . ."

"Don't want to 'ear wot you was on'y sayin'! Sick o' 'earin' wot you was on'y sayin'! You get on wi' your crossin' an' leave me t' look after me own affairs! See?"

The old man dragged his broom towards the crossing. "Ain't much good my touchin' it," he said sadly. "These 'ere streets don't need much cleanin'. Too well made, they are. This job ain't 'alf wot it was!"

Ole George snorted sympathetically. "No job is, from wot I can see of it. Too much bloomin' progress t' please me!"

"Of course, things is always goin' on, ain't they, George?"

"Goin' on!" Ole George's face was wrinkled in disgust. "Wot's the good o' things goin' on if people gets left be'ind, eh? Awnswer me that, will you?"

The crossing-sweeper wagged his head sagely. "Wot I'd like to know," he said, "is where this progress is goin' to stop. That's wot I'd like to know." He waited for a reply, but Ole George made no response. "Mind you," he continued, "I'm all for progress myself, I don't believe in gettin' rusty. . . . On'y wot I want to know is, w'ere's it goin' to stop?"

"Sime 'ere, old un," said Ole George, getting off the box-seat. "I don't earn me keep nah on a keb! Strite,

I don't! Wot's the good o' progress t' me? Oughta be a lor against it!"

"Of course," said the crossing-sweeper, "these 'ere taxis do git about quickly, an' that ole 'orse of yourn . . ."

"'Ere, down't sy nothink about the 'orse! It ain't 'is fault any more'n it's yours or mine. See? Dessay, if he could talk, he could say a few things about us. We ain't much t' speak of, are we, eh?"

The crossing-sweeper was a mild-looking old man, with dim blue eyes and a short white beard trimmed in the traditional manner of a sailor's beard. One leg was a little shorter than the other, so that he limped.

"You're too bloomin' meek, you are!" Ole George shouted to him. "That's wot's the matter wi' you. Take things lyin' down, you do. Git your livin' took away, an' say 'Thank ye' for it. Mike me sick, people like you do!"

"You ain't any better off for all your cursin' an' swearin', are you? I've always been one for keepin' meself respectable. . . ."

Ole George kicked nothing with great violence. "Wot's the good o' bein' respectable if you ain't got no money, eh? Awnswer me that, will you?" The crossing-sweeper did not appear to be able to answer him that, so he devoted himself to sweeping the crossing with great vigour. "I tell you wot," continued Ole George. "We ain't clever, that's wot's the matter wi' us! Don't need us no more. See? Git out o' it! That's wot they sy to you after they've used you up, an'

you can't do no more. Git out o' it! So 'elp me, wot a world!"

"No good complainin'. . . ."

"Give you the 'ump, things do!"

An old gentleman with two children passed over the crossing, and when they had done so the old gentleman handed a copper to each of the children so that they might give them to the crossing-sweeper.

"Oh, thank you, sir!" exclaimed the crossing-sweeper; and they passed on.

"Go on," said Ole George, "show your bloomin' gratitood for tuppence!"

"The first I've 'ad to-day. . . ."

"Bit o' fat for you, eh?"

A whistle came from a block of flats. "There you are," he said, "another taxi! Down't nobody want a four-wheeler to-dy?"

The maid blew her whistle at regular intervals, but no taxi-cab came.

"You better go an' 'eng about," suggested the crossing-sweeper. "Taxis down't seem t' be in a nurry to come up."

"Naow," exclaimed Ole George, "I wown't go. Let 'er blow 'er bloomin' inside out if she likes!"

"You didden ought t' talk like that, you know. . . ."

" 'Ow ought I to talk, then? Gow up there an' be turned off, an' sy, 'Ow, thank you, sir!' Eih?"

"You down't do no good by bein' abusive."

The whistle blew monotonously, but still no taxi came.

" 'Ark at 'er! 'Ope she likes the toon!"

"It ain't 'er fault."

"It ain't no one's fault!"

There was a pause in the whistling, and then came sharply three calls. Ole George jumped at the cab.

"So 'elp me," he shouted, as he drove off, "I got a job at last!"

MR. TRIPNEY GOES ABROAD

I

One morning in March, Mr. Tripney looked at the calendar and realized that nine years ago his wife had died. Constance and he had been married for seven years, and had rarely left the village in which they lived. Early in the summer they would discuss their coming holiday, and in a slight fever of excitement Mr. Tripney would send for pamphlets describing tours in foreign countries—Norway, the Tyrol, Algeria, Greece, Egypt—but in the end Constance would decide to go to Bournemouth. Their honeymoon had been spent in Paris, but never afterwards could Constance be persuaded to go abroad. He had sometimes shyly suggested that they might go to Paris, but invariably she had replied, "Time enough to see foreign places when we know England thoroughly," and since she was the stronger-minded of the two, she had had her way. Constance liked Bournemouth. She liked the smell of the pine woods. She liked the thought that one could hear quite good music at the Winter Gardens. The sanitary system was good! . . . Mr. Tripney realized now that Constance had never seen her own country: she had seen only Bournemouth.

Odd that a woman with a will as strong as hers

should have been so inert in her desires. Day after day she did what she had to do with as little variation as possible, and the more routine there was in her life the happier she seemed to be. She was sufficiently strong-minded to resist her husband's will, unless it was within her wish, but she was too inert to alter her ways. They went to Bournemouth, because increasingly the thought of going elsewhere became tiresome to her.

Seven years after their marriage she died. A lassitude fell upon her, and she drooped and dwindled and died. He remembered the day of her death. His hand was in hers and he felt her fingers fumbling as if she were trying to clasp his. They had liked twining their fingers together, and he guessed that she wanted him to do so again. When her wish was fulfilled, she opened her eyes and smiled at him.

"Dear Edward!" she said, in a pitifully weak voice, and then was silent and still.

He freed his fingers from hers, and went to the door and called to the nurse.

"I think she is dead," he murmured, and the nurse, as she hurried to the bed, thought to herself: "Well, *he's* cool enough, anyhow!"

Undoubtedly he had loved her. He could never love anyone as he had loved Constance, and their separation seemed to stun him. He went about his work in a state of dazed efficiency. He did it, and did it well, but he was not aware of it, nor did it give him any pleasure.

Nine years had gone by since that time, and the routine of life which had been established by Constance had continued. Every morning he walked up

the village street to the village school, and every evening he walked down the village street to his home. Occasionally he took a trip to the county town, and once a year he went to Bournemouth. But when he had returned to the village he wondered whether his absence from it had been worth while. There was no novelty or surprise in anything he did. None of his dreams of foreign travel had come true. Norway, the Tyrol, Algeria, Greece and Egypt were all names in a book of geography—places on old, faded maps. He might have gone to all of them in the nine years which had gone by since the day of Constance's death, but he had not done so. He had missed things! . . .

He recalled his honeymoon. Constance had somehow contrived to take all the fun out of it. She was one of those guide-book women, who never see the scenery because they are always reading about it. She had a passion for absorbing information: she liked things to be exact and understood and foreseen. There was nothing wayward or unpremeditated in her life.

The purpose of travel, she had insisted, was to enlarge the mind. One ought to return from a foreign city with more knowledge than one had before going to it. That trip to Paris, how neatly it had been planned and—and labelled, Mr. Tripney almost said, by Constance. There was so much to see, and so little time in which to see it, that a schedule had to be made and followed with the strictest fidelity. They had walked along the Champs Elysées to the Arc de Triomphe, discoursing on the difference between the English and the French characters, and when they had reached the

Arc they had spent a few moments in meditating on the singular career of Napoleon Bonaparte. What *would* have happened to the world if he had not been defeated at Waterloo? Of course, one could not say, but it was interesting just to speculate on what might have happened. "Very interesting, very interesting," said Constance, as they turned away. There was a Punch-and-Judy show at the corner of the Avenue de Marigny, and Mr. Tripney had said, it would be nice to sit down for a while and watch the show, but Constance said: "Oh! no, dear; we can always see a Punch-and-Judy show at home," and urged him to the Louvre to see the pictures. He had almost replied that there were picture-galleries in London, but had confessed to himself that even if there were pictures in London, those in the Louvre were not the same as those in the National Gallery. Constance had been very sensible and systematic about the Louvre. She had reminded him of the weariness one feels in galleries, and had proposed that they should explore the Louvre in sections. A room or two a day, or, better still, a school a day! . . .

"But that'll take most of our time," he had protested.

"I know, dear, but we'll see everything—and we ought to see everything. Good for us!"

He had suggested that they should go through the gallery, looking only at those pictures and pieces of statuary which compelled their attention, but Constance said that was nonsense. What compelled one might not compel another. The best plan, the safest plan was to see everything, and to see it with the least

fatigue. They would begin on the ground-floor and work their way to the top. The French for ground-floor, she might add, was *rez-de-chaussée.*

"You'd better remember that, Edward. It'll be useful to you. *Rez-de-chaussée*—ground-floor! If you and I get separated, go to one of the attendants and say: 'Rez-de-chaussée,' and wait until I turn up!"

"Yes, dear!" he had replied, inwardly resolving that he would make himself familiar with French so that he might do these things for himself.

Constance, without pity or remorse, had led him through the long, exhausting galleries of the Louvre, where bored attendants, yawning in corners, seemed to regard him with suspicion as if they imagined, even *hoped,* that at any moment he might thrust his fist through a canvas. What excitement there would have been if he had done something wildly silly like that! How electrified those bored attendants would have become! . . . His head and feet had ached as he wandered through avenues of Holy Families—he remembered now most vividly how angry he had made Constance when he suddenly said to her that he thought the Holy Family was greatly over-painted. Her lips had tightened, and she had accused him of a flippancy that was nearly blasphemous.

"But I don't mean to be offensive," he had said. "All I mean is that these painter chaps seem to have done nothing else . . . as if they couldn't think of anything else!"

Constance, who had been politely High Church—nothing extreme, of course—said that painters used to

be devout men—not like your modern people—and that, for her part, she was glad to think of them spending their lives in painting holy pictures.

"Yes—yes, of course!" said Mr. Tripney, realizing that it was useless ever to expect her to understand what he meant. Just as it had been useless to expect her to understand why he had wanted to cry when he first saw the "Winged Victory." He had read about the "Winged Victory," had even seen pictures of it, but nothing that he had read or seen had prepared him for the greatness of the statue itself. He stood before it in silence for a long time, while his heart wildly thumped.

"I say, Constance!" he began, turning to her, but before he could find words to express his feeling, she replied: "Yes, wonderful—isn't it?" and read some useful facts from the guide book. "Nobody knows who did it," she said.

His eyes had filled with tears. That proud and beautiful figure, with outstretched wings, striding forward with so much assurance, had seemed to him to be the most lovely thing in the world. She appeared to be more alive than any person who stood looking at her. The folds of her dress seemed to sway while he watched her. She filled him with elation. His tears were tears of joy.

"Isn't it funny," said Constance, "that nobody knows who did it? I think it's such a pity we don't know the sculptor's name!"

Her look then was that of a woman who had been cheated of something; a morsel of information had

been hidden from her, almost, one might say, stolen from her!

"I don't care who did it!" he had answered.

"Still," Constance considered, "it would be nice to know. I always think it's nice to know as much as you can about things!"

He had not replied, but had stood still gazing at *her*, until Constance, becoming impatient, had called him away. "Come along, dear! We've lots more to see yet!"

"Let's stay here!" he had pleaded.

"But, darling!" she had exclaimed in such a reproachful tone that he had hurriedly followed after her.

Constance, suddenly and rather nicely, had bought a picture of the statue for him from one of the kiosks in the entrance-hall on the day of their last visit to the Louvre.

"I thought you'd like it," she had said, and her thoughtfulness had touched him and made him love her still more. The picture had remained the chief of his possessions. When they went to Bournemouth he took it with him. He could truly say that not one day had passed since Constance bought it for him, without his looking at it and feeling himself thrilled by it. He had other memories of the Louvre, but none of them as vivid as this one. He had surrendered himself to Corot's pictures with a devotion not so stupendous as that for the *Winged Victory*, but as simple and unshakeable. Degas' pictures of ballet-girls pleased him, but nothing else of Degas'.

"Never seen a horse in his life," he had said to

Constance as they looked at a Degas racecourse, "but, my goodness, he's seen ballet-girls!"

Constance had thought that his attachments were odd.

"You *do* mix your likes, Edward. The *Winged Victory*, of course! Everybody likes that. That's classic. But Corot and Degas—so very dissimilar. And then, to be indifferent to the *Mona Lisa!*"

"Yes, it is queer!" he had replied.

"Well, we've done the Louvre," she said, as they left it on the last day of their visit. "We've seen everything!"

The pride with which she had said that had moved Edward. In some strange way Constance had felt herself exalted by the fact that she had personally gazed on every picture and piece of statuary in the Gallery. She seemed not to feel interest in any one picture or statue, nor, indeed, in all of them, but only in the fact that not one of them had eluded her notice. She had a passion for statistics! . . .

II

The desire to go again to Paris and see the *Winged Victory* once more began to grow in him. He did not yield to it at once. A whole year, during which the fact of the village became more and more barren and annoying, passed before he decided that he would take the journey; and that made ten years from the time of Constance's death, and seventeen years from the time of their honeymoon. But when he did at last decide to

go, his decision was swiftly made and acted on. He climbed into the char-à-banc which plied between Bovey Hayne and the station at Seatown, and soon was on his way to France.

Odd that he should feel no regret at journeying to Paris by himself. Reluctantly he admitted that he was glad not to have Constance with him. This time he would do whatever he liked—do anything or do nothing. He would just—ramble about. Every morning he would say his prayers to the *Winged Victory*, and then for the rest of the day he would—ramble. He had wished to see the lighter life of Paris, but Constance had been scornful of it. She was willing to see good French plays—Molière and Racine—at the Comédie Française, but she really could not be expected to waste her time on the unintelligent stuff the average Frenchman liked. Besides, she was too tired to go out in the evening after a hard day in the galleries and the show-places. It occurred to him now that they had missed something very vital on their honeymoon, something young and careless and free and unattached.

"We never went to the Latin Quarter," he reflected. "Or Montmartre. We ought to have done that!"

Well, he would go there this time. Ramble about. Have his lunch here, his dinner there, change his hotel from the left bank of the Seine to the right—do just what the impulse of the moment provoked him to do. No plan, no schedule, no anything. Chance would be his guide. He would sit in front of cafés for hours and hours! . . .

III

And now at last the journey was ended. Swiftly the time had passed. First, the short plunge from London to Dover. Then the sea-passage, mercifully kind, from Dover to Calais, where, after what seemed an interminable delay, the train started on a rattlesome, bumpy career to Paris. He had stood for a while in the station at Calais, watching the Blue Train as it was got ready for the long journey to the Riviera. How luxurious it looked! One was drawn down the length of France in that handsomely-appointed train to the Mediterranean. One glanced at the moist, melancholy sky of Northern France, then one dined and presently went to bed while the train dashed down the midlands, through the vineyards, across the country of the châteaux and ancient wars, and then, marvellously, in the morning one was under wide and sunny skies, and even while one was gasping with astonishment at this magic change, the Mediterranean appeared, and there were sunshine and blue sea and orange groves and olive-trees and palms and pines and the scent of jasmine and bright colours and laughter and sunlit loveliness.

Mr. Tripney looked very longingly at the Blue Train as it moved out of Calais. One of these days! . . . He felt a pang in his heart as he realized that he had spent a great portion of his life in promising himself that he would go here or do that, "one of these days"; the length of time left to him in which to go anywhere or do anything was getting shorter and the enthusiasm for change and adventure was less strong than it had

been! . . . The journey to Cannes or Monaco was not very long, although it was expensive for a man of his means. "One of these days" he would take it . . . but in the meantime, Paris would content him. A little tired and bewildered, he arrived at the Gare du Nord, where he committed himself to the care of a porter, who led him to the *douane*. His innocent looks and limited French induced the customs-officer to release his luggage from bond without examining it, and the porter, with a fatherly gesture, put him into a taxi-cab, and delivered him to the care of the driver. It seemed to Mr. Tripney that the driver then went out of his mind! He tore out of the station-yard at a speed which denoted that there was no other vehicle in the whole of Paris, and that foot-passengers never dreamt of crossing the streets. Mr. Tripney's heart rose up into his mouth, and then ran down into his boots. He tried to think of fierce, commanding words which would persuade the taxi-man to drive his cab at a reasonable speed, but only English words came from his lips, and those were not heard by the driver. It dawned on Mr. Tripney that he was not being driven to destruction. Seven hair-breadth escapes from being crushed between trams and omnibuses, and an equal number of miraculous escapes from running over and destroying large, abdominous Frenchmen, left him with a belief that perhaps a taxi-drive in Paris was not so dangerous a business as it seemed; and when he was delivered at the Hotel Dewsbury by a perfectly collected driver for a fare of three francs and fifty-five centimes, he felt that the entertainment was well worth the money. He

handed a ten franc note to the driver, and waved away the change. Then the staff of the Hotel Dewsbury took charge of him. . . .

It seemed to Mr. Tripney that, from the moment he stepped on to French soil, he had lost charge of himself. He was passed from person to person, as if he were at once very precious and totally unintelligent. In England he had been expected to take care of himself, but here in France, the entire population seemed to be engaged in a conspiracy to protect him from himself. He was handed about! . . . "This is what royalty must feel like," he said to himself, and, with a sigh of contentment, he allowed himself to be led to his room by a page-boy appointed for that purpose by the concierge. He washed his face and hands, and then sat on one of the uncomfortable chairs with which every hotel in France is furnished. Bovey Hayne seemed very far away. Mr. Tripney was in Paris! . . .

IV

The *Winged Victory* remained glorious. A fear that he might have imagined her to be more glorious than she was, kept him from ascending the stairs to her pedestal immediately he entered the Louvre. Supposing she were to disappoint his imagination! Would it not be better to remain as he was, with his vision of her undiminished by actuality? When he returned to Bovey Hayne he would still have that picture of glorious womanhood, triumphant and proud, to refresh his mind whenever he looked at it. But if he

were now to see the statue and suffer some disenchantment, how could he ever look at his picture again? The spirit of Constance seemed to say to him: "Better not take any risks, Edward. Keep on the safe side!" . . .

The suggestion roused him from his timidity.

"But that's what I've come for. To take risks!"

He spoke aloud, and was startled by the sound of his own voice. He looked anxiously about him to see if anyone were observing him.

"They'll think I'm cracked, talking to myself like that!"

But no one had heard him, and, bracing himself, he went and stood before the statue. Her glory remained: it was not diminished. The great stone which had become proud flesh instantly asserted her authority and dominion, and again he found himself, as he had done all those years ago, trembling before her, with tears in his eyes. This time there was no one to hurry him away. The Louvre was full of treasures, but none of them were of any value in his eyes compared with this single statue. He saw nothing, and wished to see nothing, but the *Winged Victory*. He stood before her, a shabby, grey little man, with kindling cheeks and moist eyes that weakly blinked, and felt himself transfigured. His blood became heroic; he could feel his spirit rousing itself within him; his body began to straighten; he wanted to shout and sing. There was no more malice or hatred or fretfulness in his heart. He had emptied out all mean and small emotions, and filled himself with nobility and courage and the love

of high and fine living. He could feel a glow in his whole body, and he knew that his eyes were shining! . . .

V

He came away from the Louvre, not having looked at anything else, and wandered about the streets in an exalted state. Presently he found himself beside the Seine, and he sat down to compose his mind. His memory had not betrayed him; the *Winged Victory* had fulfilled his remembrance and his imagination. This holiday in France was to be a renewal of his youth. Now, for certain, he knew that Constance had made an old man of him on the day she took him for her husband. She had persuaded him to enter a prison which she called Safety, and he had lived in a—padded cell. Fourteen precious years that might have been spent in peril were spent in comfortable seclusion. He had formed habits, followed a routine, made a regular ritual of his life! . . . Almost he was angry with Constance. Why had she kept him from the adventure of living, of enjoying new and unforeseen experiences, of emerging breathlessly from danger? He had seen nothing, done nothing, been nowhere. For seventeen years he had walked up the single street of Bovey Hayne to his cottage, except for the month each year when Constance and he went to Bournemouth and spent the morning on the pier and the afternoon in the Winter Gardens—and during all these seventeen years his youth had been running away from him. Here, everywhere, were things to be seen and done and

endured—and he had seen and done and endured none of them.

"She put me in a nice, clean cage!" . . .

He sat up at the end of these mutinous thoughts and listened. Strange! He could have sworn that Constance had spoken to him, but, of course, that was absurd. Constance was dead—had been dead for ten years. Yet, very distinctly, he had heard her voice say: "I couldn't have caged you if you had not been tame!"

Tame!

So that was what she thought of him! That, no doubt, was what they all thought of him—all the people in Bovey Hayne. He gloomily regarded the stone parapet in front of him. "Perhaps I am tame," he said. "Perhaps I've never been anything else."

But his mind rebelled against the thought. If he had married a woman less in love with order and regularity, one willing to go after adventures and to take risks, might he not have been tameless and proud, too, like the *Winged Victory*? He examined himself. What age was he? Forty-five. Nowadays, a man of that age was not old—he was in his prime. He had read somewhere that young girls liked men of his age better than young men, because of their knowledge and experience! He was not old! The glass, when it reflected his dingy, unbraced figure and thin, grey hair, deceived him. He was only forty-five—that was the essential fact, and might still go on adventures and undertake risks.

He rose from his seat and walked away, indifferent to his direction. The mood of exaltation, provoked in him by the *Winged Victory*, had gone, and was suc-

ceeded by a mood of depression and self-belittlement. He found himself in the Rue de Rivoli, at the corner of the Rue Royale, aware suddenly of hunger. He stood for a few moments, vaguely looking about him, and then was conscious of a young man, tidily shabby, at his elbow.

"Je ne parle pas français," he murmured mechanically, unwilling at that moment to speak to anyone.

"That's all right," the young man replied: "I can speak English. Do you want a guide?"

"Guide?"

"Yes. I can show you things—night-life of Paris—very funny!"

Mr. Tripney shook his head. "No, thanks," he said, turning away.

The young man edged nearer to him, and, after furtive looks to right and left, extended a handful of photographs to him.

"Very cheap," he said, "and very funny!"

Mr. Tripney glanced at the photographs and flushed. Rage suddenly went through him. "Go to hell," he said. "Go to hell!"

The young man fled, and Mr. Tripney, with flaming eyes, wandered up the Rue Royale in search of food.

"What a way to earn a living!" he said to himself. "My God! what a way to earn a living!"

Daylight still lingered, but soon would disappear, and he wondered whether he should look for a café where he could have a cup of tea or refrain from eating until dinner-time. One seemed on holiday to spend a great deal of one's time and thought on food. There

was a kiosk near by, and he bought the English papers and went to a restaurant where one could drink beer on the pavement, and sat there reading *The Times* and drinking a bock very slowly, until the dusk descended. The life of the city flowed past him in swift surges, but he did not heed it, for he had found a paragraph announcing an item of news about Bovey Hayne: a small, insignificant fact which, ordinarily, would not have been printed in *The Times* at all; and his mind had fastened on to it as if it were the most tremendous and important information in the world. Bovey Hayne, which had seemed so far away in the morning, came very near to him in that dusky hour, and Paris, clamouring all round him, almost disappeared. He laid *The Times* on his knee and looked across the street—not at the shops on the other side, but at the cottages in Bovey Hayne. Almost he could see Mrs. Collier and Mrs. Harrison and old Mr. Paget at their doors, gossiping! . . . A voice interrupted his brooding thoughts.

"Any news in the paper, sir?" it asked.

"Eh? Oh, no, no, not much!"

"Funny thing," the voice continued, "with all there's happening in the world, there never seems to be any news in the papers!"

Mr. Tripney laughed and glanced at the stranger.

"You can have it if you like," he said, passing *The Times* to him.

"Well, that's very kind of you," the stranger said, taking it from him. "Been here long?" he asked.

"No, not long," Mr. Tripney cautiously answered.

"Like it?"

"Yes."

"I don't."

Mr. Tripney turned to look at him.

"You're American, aren't you?" he said.

The stranger nodded. "I guess it isn't Paris I don't like, but anywheres that ain't home."

"Well, why don't you go home then?" said Mr. Tripney.

"I'm going to-morrow . . . and darn me if I ever quit again. Me for my old home town for the rest of mine! Anybody that wants all this foreign travel and culture, can have it."

"Do you know Paris well?" Mr. Tripney asked.

"Some of it. What part do you want to know?"

"Oh, I wasn't thinking of any particular part. I've read a lot in my time about the gaiety of Paris at night, and I've sometimes thought I'd like to look at it. Of course, that kind of thing is really not in my line. I'm too old for it."

"It's the old folks that seem to like it the most."

"Is that so?"

"Yeah. Old gentlemen that ought to be tucked away in their graves. I seen 'em tottering round Montmartre a few times! . . ."

"Montmartre!" Mr. Tripney interrupted. "Yes, that's one of the places I've often wanted to see. I mean, I've read about it!"

"Yeah! Well, it's a lot funnier to read about than to see. I guess the people that go have to keep on kidding themselves they're gay or they'd burst into tears.

They get me yawning so much, I feel as if my mouth 'ud never close again."

"All the same," said Mr. Tripney, "I'd like to see some of these places. Just curiosity, of course. Can you tell me the names of some of them?"

"Yeah. I can tell you a whole bunch of places."

"Perhaps if you're not doing anything else, you'd dine with me to-night. You see, I'm alone, too, and . . . and! . . ."

The American, whose name was Johnson, agreed to pool his solitude with Mr. Tripney's and make a companionship out of them.

"Tell you what," he said, "I know a place . . . a Russian cabaret . . . that'll mebbe interest you. Up in Montmartre."

Russia! Mr. Tripney had never seen anything or anyone from Russia.

"Is it Bolshy?" he asked.

"I guess that's the last thing it is," Mr. Johnson replied. "The people who own it had to clear out when the revolution came. Paris is full of Russians."

Mr. Tripney remembered to have read moving stories of the Russian *émigrés*. Former princes were selling matches in the streets of Constantinople. Countesses vainly offered their services as cooks, housemaids, and nursery governesses. Generals cleaned boots in hotels! . . . He was thrilled at the thought of observing such reversals of fortune.

"Yes, I'd like to go there!" he said.

When they had dined, they drove to the heights of Montmartre, where they stopped in front of a building

heavily illuminated with red lamps. They climbed some stairs to a large room in which gipsies and a jazz band were waiting to entertain the company. They were too early. The only occupants of the room were Russian girls waiting for dancing partners, the members of the band, and the Tziganes. Mr. Tripney and Mr. Johnson sat down at a table.

"They don't charge you anything for admission," the American said, "but you got to buy a bottle of champagne. Of course, you don't have to drink it, and if you got any sense you won't."

He examined the wine-list which was brought to him by a waiter.

"I guess as we aren't going to drink the stuff, we'll have the cheapest!"

He pointed to a wine on the list, and the waiter went to fetch it.

"It's a hundred and fifty francs, and worth about ten cents. But you get the entertainment thrown in for nothing."

Mr. Tripney looked about him. The room was decorated in the fantastic fashion affected by the Russian painters. A large salmon-pink and yellow moujik filled one wall, and a large salmon-pink and yellow peasant woman filled another. At one end of the room was a low platform, in front of which were some forms. The platform was for the members of the jazz band: the forms were for the gipsies, some of whom were sitting opposite to him. Three women, in Caucasian costume, were seated each at a table. Behind them, and separated from them by a breast-high par-

tition, were men also in Caucasian costume. Elsewhere in the room were young Russian girls in ordinary evening clothes, each sitting at a table with her arms resting on it.

"I suppose some of these girls are Russian aristocrats?" Mr. Tripney, suddenly sentimental, whispered to Mr. Johnson.

"Russian hell!" the American replied. "There are a hundred thousand Russians in France, and you'd think to hear some people each of 'em was a royal highness. More like, these girls' mothers were charwomen. Of course, if you ask them were they born in the Kremlin, they'll say they were. You won't meet any Russian nowadays who isn't a count or a prince or something terribly distinguished."

Mr. Tripney had prepared himself to moralize on the reversal of fortune which had brought aristocratic young ladies to this way of earning a living, waiting in cabarets in Montmartre for men to pay for dancing with them, but Johnson's cynicism prevented him from doing so.

Slowly the cabaret filled up. Expensively dressed American women brought their reluctant husbands to gaze on the wreckage of an empire. A few Englishmen and Frenchmen came in and sat down and waited until food was brought to them. The jazz band began to make its infernal noise, and several of the Russians danced, and presently there emerged from a room at the back, a pale, untidy Russian woman, whose face bore no paint or powder. She was accompanied by a foolish-looking, half-drunken, fair-haired man, with

whom she danced in a clumsy, bumping manner, for the man could not control his steps.

"Is he a Russian, do you think?" inquired Mr. Tripney.

"He looks like he'd come out of a Russian novel. 'Drivelling Dmitri,' I'd say he was."

The name pleased Mr. Johnson, and he repeated it several times.

"Look at 'Drivelling Dmitri'," he said, whenever the foolish fellow danced by.

"The woman doesn't seem to be enjoying herself," Mr. Tripney murmured.

"It's her job," Mr. Johnson replied. "That's how she earns her living."

"Some ways of earning a living don't amount to much," Mr. Tripney said, remembering the young man with the photographs at the corner of the Rue Royale and the Rue de Rivoli.

A young girl, one of the dancing partners, came up the stairs and stood in an archway at the end of the room. Her large, moist eyes glanced this way and that, but there was no look of happy anticipation in them. They were extraordinarily sad eyes. Mr. Tripney stared at her, fascinated by her sombre beauty.

"That girl," he whispered to his companion, "over there—the one with the big eyes—just come in! . . ."

"Yeah," said Mr. Johnson. "I know her. She's a Georgian. She'll dance with you if you want her. Want to?"

Mr. Tripney shrank back. "Oh, no! No, thanks!" he hurriedly said. "I wasn't thinking of that—I just

thought she looked sad and—and lovely. As a matter of fact, I can't dance."

"Yeah, she's sad-looking all right! Most folks from her part of the world are. I guess anybody'd feel kind of sad if they came from a place where pogroms and massacres are common as mosquitoes in Mexico. I shouldn't wonder if that girl's pa and ma ain't been shot up some by Bolshies. Seems to me, when it comes to real cruelty and torture and killing, the brotherly-love merchants and the we're-all-as-good-as-one-another brigade have tyrants like Nero licked. I don't know as I wouldn't rather spend a week-end with old Momma Borgia than a couple of minutes with Comrade Trotsky. I'd feel safer somehow. You should learn to dance," he added abruptly.

"I'm too old! . . ."

"You keep on saying you're too old. Sakes alive, man, it's only the old ones nowadays that gets any fun at all. The young ones are that mussed up with themselves they hardly know how to last out the day. You take a glance round this place."

Mr. Tripney took a glance round. Certainly the young people in the room seemed to be quite joyless. "Perhaps," he said, "this sort of thing bores them."

"Then what do they come for? They don't have to," Mr. Johnson retorted. "But don't you believe it. They bring their parents here. I don't know what in hell's come over the young these days. They don't seem to have no buck in 'em. They seem kind of bored and—dead. Look at that girl over there!" He pointed to a

pretty girl in a group of rather older people. "Her face ain't real—it's a mask. I suppose she's got a brain, but she don't go about showing it off."

But Mr. Tripney was not listening to Mr. Johnson. His eyes were directed towards the Georgian girl with the large, sombre eyes. If only he could dance! . . . Her eyes caught his, and for a moment he thought she was about to smile at him, but she did not do so, and, after a moment, she looked away. Perhaps her failure to smile at him was because she had found no friendliness in his glance. He had felt his features tightening as she looked at him, and perhaps his nervousness had made him seem hard to her. But he was disappointed. He wanted to see what her eyes looked like when they were lit with laughter.

The room was filling up, and couples were dancing while the jazz band worked itself up into a stage of negroid excitement. The pale, untidy Russian woman with the silly-looking man whom Mr. Johnson had nicknamed "Drivelling Dmitri" swung past them, bumping into the rest of the company. Presently, there was a diversion. "Drivelling Dmitri" had fallen on the ground, pulling the pale, untidy woman after him.

"They ought to put that guy out," Mr. Johnson murmured, glancing contemptuously at the poor, tow-haired fool, who was not Russian at all, but French. "Come up from the provinces for a night out in Paris, the boob! Probably pinched his boss's money! . . ."

"Drivelling Dmitri" had scrambled to his feet, and

his companion and he were dancing again, but more unsteadily than ever, for the hot air of the room was fuddling the man's drink-heated brain. They collided repeatedly with other dancers, and with people sitting at the tables, and presently there were complaints about them. The manager of the cabaret was told by several indignant men that unless "Drivelling Dmitri" went, they and their parties would go. The pale, untidy Russian woman stood patiently by while the manager argued with the Frenchman, and then, when his drunken vanity had been soothed and he was persuaded to depart, she humbly and obediently went with him. Mr. Johnson saw Mr. Tripney's eyes watching them, as they left the cabaret.

"Well," he said, shrugging his shoulders, "it's how she earns her living. That's the gay life! If you live like it, you got to be prepared for drunks!"

Mr. Tripney felt revolted by Johnson's cynical talk. A sudden disgust for all this meretricious gaiety went through him, and, as it did so, his eyes were filled with a vision of the *Winged Victory*, the proud, passionate Woman! . . . He leant back against the red velvet cushions and stared before him. Only that morning he had seen her. His heart had moved more quickly as he looked at her, and heroic desires had filled his mind. He remembered a line of poetry he had read: "Tameless and swift and proud." How well it described the *Winged Victory*! In the morning he would go again and renew that exalted mood. Then the vision faded, and he saw that he was staring straight into the eyes

of the Georgian girl. She returned his glance very steadily, smiling at him, and, almost unaware of what he was doing, he smiled back at her.

"That girl wants you to go and speak to her," said Mr. Johnson.

"Eh?" He came back to his companion with a jerk of his thoughts. "Oh, no! No, no!" he said, and lapsed into silence. They did not speak for a minute or two. The jazz band had given place now to the Tziganes, who sat in their Caucasian costume on the forms in front of the little stage and made the most hideous noise Mr. Tripney had ever heard.

"I can't stand this," said Mr. Johnson. "I'd go mad if I had to listen long to it. Anyway, I'm going. I got to get up early to-morrow. I sail from Cherbourg, thank God! In a week I'll see Nantucket, and then New York, and two days after I'll be back home, and I'll have to be dead and stiff before I quit it again. Coming?"

Mr. Tripney hesitated. "No, thanks," he said. "I think I'll stay a little longer." The Georgian girl had smiled at him a second time.

"Well, good-bye and good luck!"

"Good-bye, and thank you for a pleasant evening. I hope you'll have a happy journey home."

Mr. Johnson struggled from the table. Then he turned and said, "Say, she's a nice girl, that Georgian. I'd cotton on to her if I was you."

Mr. Tripney smiled, but did not reply.

"So long," said Mr. Johnson, moving away.

"Good-bye!"

VI

The girl had moved away while they were making their farewells, and she was sitting now at the end of the room, by the side of another girl. It seemed to Mr. Tripney that hardly any of the girls got partners. Most of the men were dancing with members of their parties. The Georgian girl had not danced all evening. He thought to himself that her earnings as a partner must be small.

"Of course, this may be a bad night. Other nights she may have plenty of partners."

He watched her out of the corner of his eye, and saw that she seldom spoke to her neighbour. Hardly any of the partners talked to one another. They sat or stood about, waiting! . . . The Tziganes, through the mercy of heaven, had now ceased to make their horrible noise, and were succeeded by the jazz band. The dancing, which had ceased while the gipsies gave their entertainment, began again, and soon the floor was crowded with couples. Mr. Tripney felt lonely and out of place. If only he could dance! . . . At that moment, his eyes met those of the Georgian girl, and now she smiled at him without pretence. Her large eyes looked very lovely! . . . He saw that the seat beside her was no longer occupied, and, feeling very nervous, he got up and threaded his way through the dancers until he reached her. He sat down, wondering what he should say to her.

"You . . . you dance with me?" she asked, in French.

He shook his head. "I can't dance," he replied in English, and as he did so, thought what a fool he was to speak to her in a language which she probably did not understand. But she understood enough to be able to talk to him in a slow, fumbling fashion.

"That is pity!" she exclaimed. "You do not like dancing?"

"Oh, I like it all right," he answered, "only . . . only I've never learnt how."

"No?" she said.

"You see, I've lived a very quiet sort of life," he continued.

"Quiet?"

"Yes; what you call—well, quiet. I live in the country! . . ."

She nodded comprehendingly. "Ah! the country. Yes, yes!" she said, and then added, "You should learn to dance."

"But I'm too old," he protested.

"Oh, no! No one is too old. Only the dead are old."

She spoke quite simply and without affectation. Mr. Tripney looked at her. She was a very young girl, and yet she had an old, sedate manner. "I wonder," he said, half to himself.

"What do you wonder?" she asked.

"I wonder if it isn't the living who are old, and the dead who are always young."

"Perhaps," she replied. "I do not know. But perhaps! It is a pity you do not dance!"

She glanced about the room as she spoke, and

understanding came to him. He realized that she earned her livelihood by dancing, and that there could be no profit, and certainly no pleasure, for her in a polite conversation with him.

"Look here," he said, bending closer to her, "stay here and talk to me. We'll sit out! . . ."

"Sit out?" She was puzzled by the expression.

"Yes. That's what we say in England when dancers talk together instead of dancing. You'll be my sitting-out partner instead of my dancing partner! . . ."

"Oh, m'sieu!" She laughed derisively.

"Of course I'll pay the fees whatever they are. You see, my dear, I'm here by myself, and this sort of place, where people are enjoying themselves, makes a lonely man feel much lonelier."

She followed him with difficulty. "Yes?" she said.

"I—I like the look of you. I've been noticing you all evening. I'd like to sit here beside you and—and just talk to you, if you don't mind."

"But your friend! . . ."

"He's gone. He's going to America to-morrow. I don't really know him. I only met him to-night for the first time."

"Ah, I see. You are alone."

"Yes."

"And you cannot dance?"

"No."

"But it will be dull for you."

"Oh, no," he hastily answered, "not if you'll sit here and talk to me."

"But what can I speak about? I do not speak English very much, and you do not speak French very much. Nor do I—very much!"

"You speak English excellently," he replied.

"You say so, but I know different."

They talked in this manner for a while, she trying her English on him; he, after persuasion, trying his French on her; and while they talked, the dancers in the outer room swayed up and down to the jazz music. Dancing partners, bored and tired, sat round or stood against the wall, hardly any of them finding employment.

"There don't seem to be many people dancing with your friends," said Mr. Tripney.

"No," she replied. "It is not a good night. Sometimes it is like that. Other times it is different. You come again?"

"Oh, I don't know. I don't suppose so."

She made an expression of disappointment. "Oh!" she said, drawing the word out.

He looked along the passage and saw a buffet. "Would you like something to eat?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, if you like!" she replied.

They walked to the buffet together where he gave her caviare sandwiches, which were frightfully expensive, and champagne, which was more expensive. She ate the sandwiches, but did not drink the wine.

"Not very good, is it?" he murmured, nodding his head towards the bottle.

"It is not for drinking," she murmured.

There were other sandwiches, and she greedily ate all that were given to her.

"Hungry?" he asked.

"A little," she said.

He ordered more sandwiches for her, regardless of their price. "I believe the poor girl's hungry," he said to himself.

Presently she stood up. "Thank you," she said, and turned to go.

"But," he said, following her, "I want you to sit and talk to me!"

She held out her hands in a gesture of dissent. "But, m'sieu, I cannot. It is not possible. I must dance if people want me!"

"Yes, I know all that, but I said I'd pay your charges —whatever they are!"

She sat down abruptly in the seat where he had found her, and he sat down beside her. The crowd in the cabaret was beginning to diminish, and Mr. Tripney realized that the hour was late.

"You see," he said, "I just want to talk to you! . . ."

She turned to him. "Is that all, m'sieu," she said.

"Why, yes!" he replied.

She regarded him for a few minutes, as if she were testing him.

"M'sieu," she said at last, "I do not live on what I get for dancing. It is not enough."

"Yes?" said Mr. Tripney, stupidly.

"Will you come home with me?"

"Home with you!" He said the words mechanically.

"Yes. I have a room. It is not far."

"I——I! . . ."

"Will you come with me—yes? It will not be much . . ." She fumbled for a word, and then said, "cost!"

"Oh, mademoiselle, I did not know! . . ."

She smiled at him. "What did you not know, m'sieu?" she said.

"Why, why! . . . Oh, mademoiselle!"

Suddenly Mr. Tripney was overcome by emotion. She looked at him in astonishment. "Is it that you are not well, m'sieu?" she said.

He tried to recover himself. "No, mademoiselle, but—forgive me. I must seem a foolish old man to you. I did not know—I had no idea—you see I am a very simple person! . . ."

She began to understand the meaning of his disjointed sentences.

"Why, m'sieu," she said, smiling indulgently at him, "do you think that I come here? Is it to entertain myself?"

He did not reply.

"It is not so amusing, this place," she continued, "that I would come to it for . . . what you call . . . fun. Did you see that one to-night—the Frenchman who was drunk?" She pronounced the word as if it were spelt 'dronk.' He nodded his head. "It is not very entertaining," she continued, "to dance with that one, or to—to . . ."

She did not finish her sentence. The sombre eyes suddenly filled with tears, but as suddenly she wiped

them away. "You will come with me, yes? It is not far, my room."

Mr. Tripney looked at her. She was young and had some beauty. Her large, lovely eyes were tired, and already the crows' feet were gathering round them. Her lips were reddened, though not excessively, and her face was "made up." In Bovey Hayne she would have looked dreadful, but here she seemed almost simple. The "make-up" was not coarsely applied. It did not disgust him. He could see something pretty and attractive in it. The girl was pleasing.

"You will come?" she said, and there was some anxiety in the tone of her voice. Mr. Tripney felt himself vaguely stirred. After all, one lived in a world of fact. He remembered to have read—in Kipling, wasn't it?—that her profession was the oldest in the world. Mr. Tripney took no responsibility for mankind. He recognized that certain things happened and could not be prevented, that they had happened from the beginning of time and would probably continue to happen until the end of time. No use butting his head against that wall. All the same! . . .

He looked at her again, and desire filled him. She saw that he had become acquiescent, and with some eagerness in her voice, she repeated her question.

"You will come with me—yes?"

He nodded his head, and immediately she stood up.

"I will get ready to go," she said, and left him.

He, too, stood up, and found that he was trembling. Words or thoughts seemed to be struggling, without

success, to get into his mind, but his mind, unwilling to hear them, shut itself resolutely against them. He became terribly self-conscious. He dared not meet the eyes of the other people in the cabaret, for he felt that they knew what he was about to do, and he was ashamed.

Then the girl came, cloaked for the street, and as she approached him, her wan eyes smiled! . . .

Again he remembered the *Winged Victory*, that proud and undefeatable figure, and, with the recollection, came the thought that the Georgian girl represented the Woman in Defeat. "This poor girl's been beaten," he said to himself. Her wings, if she ever had any, were broken.

"We go now," she said, and led the way to the staircase. He followed her a little blindly, feeling that his cheeks were on fire and that he must not look at anyone. He got his hat and coat from an attendant, and then the girl and he emerged from the cabaret into the street. A loafer with an evil face sprang out of the shadows made by the red glare from the illuminated signs, and the girl instructed him to find a taxi. Mr. Tripney did not speak. The sudden change from the heated dancing-room to the cold street chilled him, and he buttoned his coat tightly round him. In a few moments the taxi, with the loafer standing on the splashboard, drove up, and after directions had been given to the driver, the girl and Mr. Tripney were taken off he knew not where. She snuggled close to him in the cab, and he realized that she was performing the rites of her profession, but he did not respond to

her embraces, not even when she put his arm around her waist and leant warmly against him.

"You do not speak," she said. "You not like me?"

"Eh? Yes, yes, of course, I like you. I like you very much."

"Then why do you not love me?"

The expression startled him.

"Love you!" he said.

"Yes, love me! I want you to love me!"

She held up her face to him and he kissed her.

"Oh," she said, "you are so cold! . . ."

The Defeated Woman, trading in her kisses! . . .

She pressed closer to him, and, putting her arms tightly round his neck, kissed him with extraordinary passion.

"That is how to kiss," she said. "You like that?"

He stared at her, and, while he stared, he saw again the *Winged Victory*, "tameless and swift and proud," and then he heard Constance speaking to him, and what she was saying was: "Dear Edward!"

The *Winged Victory* vanished, and in its place came a vision of Bovey Hayne. Its single, long street was full of sunshine. At one end of it was the sea, coloured like opals, and at the other his school. Outside the village was a wood, where, in springtime, the trees rose out of a bed of wild hyacinths so that they seemed to be floating over a blue mist. And this was springtime! The hedges were full of spring flowers, and he could hear the incessant murmur of young animals in the fields, and the noise of birds, busy with their

nestlings! . . . The cab stopped with a jerk, and the girl opened the door and got out. Mr. Tripney lay back against the cushions and thought! . . .

"It is here," said the girl impatiently.

He regarded her again. He seemed always to be regarding her. Young and yet old! . . .

He got out of the cab and said to the driver: "Attendez, s'il vous plait!" Then he turned to the girl, and led her to the door of the house where she lived. He had taken notes from his pocket-book, and now he put them into her hand.

"Good-night, my dear!" he said. "I . . . I'm sorry. Good-night!"

Then he returned to the cab, and, shouting the name of his street to the driver, closed the door. From the little window in the back of the taxi he could see the bewildered girl, standing in the shadow of the doorway, looking after the cab, while her hand clutched the notes he had placed in it.

VII

Two days later he was again in the char-à-banc, on the last stage of his journey home. He looked out of the windows. They were driving along a piece of cliff road, on one side of which was the sea. On the other was a high hedge, and beyond that, rising, climbing fields. Far out, in a shimmering mist, a fishing-boat with brown sails beat homeward. Mr. Tripney closed his eyes, and saw for a second or two the tired girls in the cabaret, waiting for someone to hire them as dancing partners, and the hard, red glare of the illu-

minated signs hanging in the streets of Montmartre. He opened them again, and again he saw the fishing-boat far out on the horizon, beating its way homeward. There were cowslips and daffodils blowing in the fields, and the hedges were full of primroses and wild violets and would presently be full of foxgloves! He drew in his breath, and smelt the mingled odour of the sea and burning bracken. Above his head, the seagulls poised and wheeled! . . . The char-à-banc rounded a corner, and came to the first houses in Bovey Hayne. It passed his school! . . .

"Well, home again!" said the conductor. "And glad of it, I daresay?"

Mr. Tripney nodded his head, but did not speak.

ADVENTURE

He climbed to the top of the tramcar, and sat down on the back seat. There was a certain grimness in his look, such as one sees on the face of a man who has made up his mind to do some work that is likely to be unpleasant.

"I shall go in," he said to himself, compressing his lips, "and if he says anything to me about it, I shall tell him straight out that I took a day off because I wanted to. See if I don't! That's what I'll tell him! I shan't lie about it!"

He reflected on the miserable spirit that would be shown by the other chaps were they in his situation. Morrison would be sure to snivel and say: "Please, sir. I've had a domestic bereavement!" and Green would stutter with nervousness, and say that he had had a bad headache, or that his wife had had another, and that he hoped they would overlook it this once. . . . Snivellers! None of that for him! He was human same's they were! He had impulses same's they had. . . . He remembered to have read somewhere that William Sharp once stayed away from the bank in which he was employed, and when asked for an explanation had said: "I went into the country to hear the cuckoo call!" Something like a man, he was. . .

It was not as if he had ever done anything before.

He hadn't; but all the same he was human same's they were, and it was not human to go and work in a stuffy shop on a fine morning like yesterday was. What a fine day it had been! The air was clean and clear even at Chalk Farm, and the trees were covered with young, green leaves, and the sparrows were making a devil of a jolly noise. . . . Well, could anyone blame him for turning away from the Holborn emporium to seek the joyfulness of Hampstead Heath? Could they, now? Of course they couldn't! Not if they was human same's he was! If Toft, the shopwalker, beast that he was, said anything to him, he'd jolly well say something to Toft. Toft wasn't everybody, though he might think he was. Of course, they might sack him. . . . Well, what if they did? He was human same's they were, and if they chose to sack a chap for being human—well, that just showed the sort of firm they were. He could get employment elsewhere.

Anyhow, yesterday was worth the risk of the sack. Jolly fine it had been. Of course, he couldn't explain why it was that he had gone to the Heath instead of to the shop. Must have been impulse. Just impulse. That was it. Impulse! He had climbed to the top of a tramcar, and had paid his fare—three ha'pence, it was—and then the impulse came, and before he quite knew what he was doing he was off the car and walking towards the Heath. It was a pity about the three ha'pence. . . . And if he had gone to the shop, what would he have done? Put on a ridiculous frock-coat, its lapels full of pins, and spent the day selling stuff

at two-three a yard to women who didn't seem to realize that he was human same's they were. Women! Huh! . . . He'd have had to help them to make up their silly minds. "We're selling quite a lot of this shade, madam!" or "I think you'll find this suit your purpose, madam!" or "Mmm! No-o, madam, I don't think that's quite what you want. This is more like it!" or "Shall I send it for you, madam? No trouble at all, madam. What name and address, please?" or "Anything else to-day, madam? No! Theng-cue!" *That* on a day like yesterday! The smell of stuff at two-three a yard on a day like yesterday! . . .

He had stood on the Spaniards' Road, and had seen the pinnacles of City churches shooting up into clouds of smoke and mist. "Didden look bad, neither!" And had looked towards the little humpy hills at Harrow that seemed like cushions for the sky. He had thrown stones into the Round Pond, and had set a dog barking furiously, to the consternation of an elderly lady. He had wandered round the ambling lanes, and had gaped at the cottage where Byron lived and the place where Keats heard the nightingale. He had seen a great blackbird . . . and then he had plucked whinblossoms, not without fear that he might be offending against the bye-law which forbade malicious injury to trees, shrubs, plants, etc.

"But it ain't malicious," he said to reassure himself.

He had crossed the horse-ride and had thrown himself down on a high grassy place, and had rolled about and slept and dreamt, and then rolled about and slept and dreamt again. He had helped three boys

to catch tiddlers in the ponds beyond the horse-ride, and had learned much of the habits of that fish and the respective value of a plain tiddler and a tiddler with a red throat. . . . Clay had got on his boots and trousers and on his hands, and once he slipped on a wet bank, and his foot went into the water. The boys laughed, and he laughed too, and a girl who went by—a jolly girl, with long hair and bright eyes—laughed. Fine girl, she was. Looked nice! Not like the girls in the shop, white and yellow, and always got a headache. . . . He'd go up there again one day. . . .

He had spent a fabulous sum on his midday meal at "The Bull and Bush"; but then what was the good of doing a thing like that unless it was well done? Might as well enjoy yourself proper! He had given twopence to the waiter! . . . And when the meal was over, no rushing back to the shop as if you hadn't got a minute to spare. He had strolled about the Heath quietly and comfortably, smoking a cigar that cost fourpence. It was a good cigar, too. He could tell that because the ash did not fall off for a long time. . . .

He remembered that he sat on a fallen tree for a while and watched some children playing cricket, and once he ran and fielded the ball for them, and they asked him if he'd like a turn at the wicket, and when he'd looked round to see if anyone was watching he took the bat . . . and was bowled first ball. After that he had wandered into the Garden Suburb, and had cocked a critical eye at the houses. Not bad, they weren't. He saw a girl in a floppy dress. . . . Of course,

it was clever and all that, but floppy dress was not his style. He preferred the style of the girl who had laughed when he fell into the pond. Smart, she was. Her skirt fitted closely about her shapely limbs, and she had on a pair of fine silk stockings that you could see through. . . .

"That's what I call a girl!" he said to himself, as he thought of her. "I mean to say, that's a proper girl! . . ."

When he came out of the Garden Suburb he had wandered aimlessly but contentedly about. He had found his way to the little zoo at Golders Hill, and had seen the kangaroo jump in the oddest fashion. There were queer-looking birds there, all coloured, and deer that came and nosed in your hand. . . . He had walked into Golders Park, and called for tea at the house that was formerly a mansion, but is now an eating-place. He sat there until the dusk came down, and then he walked about chi-iking a girl or two. . . . At supper-time he had gone home; but he sat so long in his room thinking of the girl who had laughed when he fell in the pond that he forgot to go down to supper, and, rather than disturb Mrs. Carson, he went out to get something to eat. Chalk Farm had an ugly look last night, and it reeked! He had suddenly become depressed and unhappy, and had had a strange inclination to cry. . . .

Well, all that took place yesterday. Now for Toft. Of course the firm would be wild when they knew, and, after all—well, he was human same's they were. Speaking strictly, he ought not to have stayed away

from the shop. He was prepared to admit that. But there was an excuse for him. He hadn't had much of a life. . . . How would they like it, eh? The stink of stuff at two-three a yard all day! How would they like it? If Toft began bullying him! . . .

He entered the shop, and when he had taken off his outdoor coat, and put on his official frock-coat, he prepared to enter his department. There was a heavy smell of carpet in the room.

"Co, what a fug!" he exclaimed to himself.

Toft eyed him severely.

"You didn't turn up yesterday?" he said, as if he were giving news. "How is that?"

"No, sir, I——"

"Eh?"

"The truth is, sir——"

"Well?"

"Please, sir, I wassen feelin' very well!"

"Oh! You ought to have sent a message. You know that, don't you?"

"Yessir! I'm sorry, sir!"

"Well, don't let it occur again—see!—or you'll hear more about it! Look sharp, now; we're very busy!"

"Yessir! Thank you, sir! I'm very sorry!"

"All right. Get to your counter, will you? There's a lot to do!"

"Yessir!"

"Of course, we shall stop a day's salary!"

He looked up at Mr. Toft. "Yessir," he said.

DISCONTENT

I CLIMBED to the top of Lurigedan, and while I lay there panting for breath, for God knows I am no climber, Murty came to me.

"It's a brave day!" he said in greeting.

"It is, indeed!" I replied

He lay down by my side and gazed out towards the sea.

"But, sure, it'll not keep up," he said after a little while. "It'll be soft the morrow."

"How do you know, Murty?" I asked.

"It's the way it always is here. Brave an' fine one day, an' rainin' the next. Ye'll be goin' away soon?"

I nodded my head.

"On Saturday, mebbe."

"Yes, on Saturday, Murty."

He sat up and caught hold of his toes with his fingers, and swayed himself about for a few moments.

"It's well to be you," he said, "to be goin' over to Englan'."

"Why, Murty?"

"Ah, sure, ye see things there. It's the quare lonely place this to be stayin', an' you not seein' a livin' sowl thrum one day's end til another, barrin' the people

ye see thrum the time ye're born til the time ye die, an' them not knowin' anny more nor yourself, God help them!"

"It's lonely everywhere, Murty," I said. "Lonelier in London than it is here." I told him how when I had gone to London first, a boy of sixteen, I had stood outside the Mansion House one Saturday and cried because there were six or seven million men and women about me and I did not know one of them. "Here you know everybody," I said.

"Ah, but you can see things in towns," he urged. "There's nathin' to see here on'y an ould sweety shop, an' McClurg's public-house, an' the long car comin' down the road wi' the mails. I'll not be stoppin' here once I get the chance to go away."

I said that I should have thought he would like to be a farmer, but he shook his head vigorously. "Norra bit o' me'll do that," he said. "There's nathin' to do here but work thrum the dawn o' day till the dark o' night, an' in the winter-time it's that cowl' wi' the win' blowin' thrum the sea enough to blow the head aff ye that ye can't go out, an' have to be sittin' crouchin' over the fire, God help ye, to keep yerself warm. It's no life that for a man, but a life for a dumb baste that has nathin' to do but ate the grass, an' lie down an' wait for the butcher to come an' take it til the slaughter-house. If ye wur to go into the village now, ye'd see the fellas lyin' up agin the curfew tower, wi' their han's in their pockets, an' nathin' at all in their heads but wonderin' what to do wi' themselves afore bedtime, an' not findin' no answer!"

I became inept. "The reading-room," I suggested.

"Readin'-room!" he exclaimed scornfully. "Sure, what's the good o' a readin'-room til annyone, wi' a lot o' ould papers in them? Ye can't go into a readin'-room ivry night in the week. I never was in the one in Cushendall barrin' once, an' there was nathin' there but ould *Christian Her'lds*, an' religious papers that make ye sick to read them. The way they ram Jases down your throat is enough to send a man to the bad. I'll be off to the town as soon as I can!"

I talked to Murty about rural depopulation and the land-hunger.

"Ah, people want land right enough," he said, "but it's a sore lonely life to lead workin' it." He stood up as he spoke and looked down into the valley. "Wud ye just look at ould Barney O'Hara down there," he said. He pointed to the fields lying at the foot of the Lurigedan, and I rose and walked to his side. I saw an old man, very bent, binding hay.

"D'ye think I want to be the like o' that when I'm his age?" said Murty. "He can't read or write, that ould lad, an' he knows nathin', an' he works that hard he's never had time to find annything out. All he can do is work his lan'. If ye talk til him about annythin' else, he gets moidhered. An' it's the way wi' all the men here. They can't enjoy theirselves because there's nathin' til enjoy. If I was in a town now, I woulden need to be goin' to bed at half-eight or nine because I'm tired o' doin' nathin'. Ye can go to a music-hall in a town for tuppence, an' hear all the latest songs, but ye never hear nathin' here except

mebbe in the summer-time when a visitor like yourself comes, an' then the songs is oul'!"

"Will you go to Belfast?" I asked.

"No, I'll go to Glasgow. There's more value there."

"Do you know anyone in Glasgow?"

"Ay, I have a brother there. My brother Ned. It was him toul' me Glasgow was better value nor Bilfast. It was him made the quare fool o' me one time when he was here over the head of a song I was singin'. Says he, 'That song's brave an' oul'!' An' me on'y heard it a wee while afore he come!"

"What does your brother do in Glasgow?" I asked.

"He's a barman."

"And how long has he to work?"

"He begins at eight in the mornin' an' he laves aff at eleven at night; but sure he gets a half-holiday once a week, an' he has all day on Sunday, for they won't let you drink on a Sunday in Glasgow; an' he goes til a music-hall ivry week, an' sometimes he goes til two in one day, for some places has two houses a night, an' you can do the two for fourpence in the gallery. That's cheap enough. It 'ud take more'n fourpence to give you pleasure in Cushendall!"

"But, Murty," said I, "this is a finer place than Glasgow. This hill and the valley and the sea cannot be compared with Glasgow and your brother's foul-smelling public-house."

"Ah, what's the good of scenery in the winter-time?" he replied. "Ye get tired o' lukkin' at them all the year round. Ye want a change. In a town, now, ye get change. There's crowds o' people an' all

the latest songs. . . . It's all very fine to talk, sir, but Ned doesn't want to come back here, an' I do want to get away oura this. That tells, doesn't it?"

We stood there regarding the figure of Barney O'Hara as he patiently bound the bundles of hay, and I thought to myself how sad a thing it was that the boy by my side should long to fling himself into the unutterable hideousness of Glasgow out of the incomparable beauty of Antrim, and when I had thought that I turned to Murty and told him so.

"It's not sad at all," he replied. "Ye'd be wantin' the town yerself if ye were livin' here all the time. It's right an' easy to be talkin' the way you're talkin' when you on'y come for a trip, but ye'd be talkin' differ'nt, I can tell ye, if ye lived here all the year. Come on," he said suddenly, "an' I'll race ye down the grassy slope."

We half ran, half fell down the grassy slope, and in a short time we came to the field where Barney O'Hara was binding hay.

"That's a brave evenin'!" said Murty to the old man, as we ran by.

"Ay, it is," replied the old man without looking up.

"Oul' footer!" murmured Murty as he ran on.

COMPARISON

He and I sat on a seat in Hyde Park, and watched the drift of fashionable folk go by. He was a small, neat man, with a pleasant, pale face and soft blue eyes, in which there was a whimsical, wondering look. His mouth was puckered up when I first saw him, but he was not whistling: he seemed to me to be exclaiming in astonishment. He gazed about him very eagerly; he appeared to be unable to look at the fashionable folk too closely. Now and then, when some resplendent man or beautiful woman went by, his lips would pucker as if he were saying "Oh!" to himself; and his eyes gleamed like those of a puzzled child. He turned and spoke to me quite simply, without self-consciousness, as if it were natural for two men who had never seen each other before to speak and be neighbourly.

"You can't get over it," he said, "they're nice-lookin'! I mean to say, you can't 'elp lookin' at 'em. That young girl that jus' passed now, she was nice-lookin', wasn't she?"

I looked at the retreating form of a tall, dark girl, with slender limbs, and nodded my head.

"I don't mean to say she's beautiful," he continued. "Not what you'd call *beautiful*! But nice-lookin'! Eh? Walks nice, an' the way she talked, too! That was

nice! An' 'er 'air, an' the way she was dressed! There's a lot of 'em about 'ere like that. Nice-lookin'! Got nice 'ands!——" He held out his hands, as he said this, and I saw that they were hard and rough and red; the nails were broken and distorted, and the knuckles were knubbly. He dropped his hands to his side and laughed. "Not like mine, eh?" he said.

A boy went by, exquisitely tailored, and at his side was a girl of seventeen. She was smiling at something the boy said to her, and as she passed us she put her hand up to her loose hair and flung it out so that it fell from her shoulder and down her back. It was thick and brown, and it shone with beauty. I forgot the little man at my side until I heard him speak again.

"Now, she's nice-lookin'," he said. "I mean to say she's real nice, she is! An' 'e was nice-lookin' too! Well-set-up young feller, I call 'im! Make a nice pair, they will! Shouldn't be a bit surprised if they 'it it off!" He remained silent for a few moments, and then began again. "I s'pose they bin to church together, eh? Yes, I expect so! They all go to church about 'ere! You know! Church Parade they call this! Mind you, I don't blame 'em. You can't 'elp likin' 'em when you look at 'em! Nice-lookin' an' that! You know, I can't make it out! I mean to say, 'ow it is? They ain't wot you'd call beautiful—some on 'em downright ugly, but some'ow they're nice to look at. You know! Walks nice an' talks nice, and got nice 'ands!—I mean to say, look at me now! I'm not like them. I mean to say, if I 'ad the clothes they 'ave, I couldn't carry it off, you know. Look at my 'ands! Why, I couldn't

wear gloves on 'em! An' I don't talk the way they do. An' walk! Well, I mean to say, it's silly to talk about it, ain't it? An' my wife, too!—She was nice-lookin' when I first knew 'er. Proper nice-lookin', she was! I mean to say she was as nice-lookin' as any 'ere, considerin'! Why, you wouldn't believe wot my wife was like when she was a young girl. You know! Jaunty, she was! Walked about like anythink, an' did 'er 'air nice, an' all that! But she ain't like it now, you know! I mean to say, she's all right, reely, only some'ow . . . That young girl we see jus' now with that boy, she'll be nice-lookin' when she gets to be my wife's age, same's she is now. Only older! That's all. She'll do 'er 'air nice, an' 'ave nice 'ands, an' talk nice. Don't matter wot age she is, she'll be nice-lookin'. Lots of old 'uns 'ere! Sixty if they're a day, some of 'em! Only they don't look old! Of course, they make 'emselves up a bit, but it ain't all that! Even when they don't make 'emselves up, they look nice. You know wot I mean! Now, my wife, she's not like that. She's not more'n forty, but she looks a good bit more. Don't seem to take no pride in 'erself. 'Er 'air—well, of course, it ain't to be expected, not with all she 'as to do! I mean to say, it ain't reasonable to expect it. Only! . . . Well, you know the way it is yourself! I can't help thinkin' of wot she was like when I first knew 'er! See! Proper nice-lookin' she was! An' that partic'lar!"

The Park was crowded now, and the fashionable folk pressed close to us as they went by. Beautiful women, beautifully clad, passed to and fro in an odour

of fine perfumes. The little man drew his breath through his nostrils.

"That's nice, that is!" he exclaimed. "I bet that cost a bit! Did you 'ear the way their dresses rustle, eh? Silk! I often come 'ere of a Sunday mornin' an' spend a penny on a seat. Fair treat, I call it! Of course, my wife she 'as to be cookin' the dinner, else I'd bring 'er, too. Do 'er good, it would. I mean to say it 'ud do anyone good. It's nice to see people lookin' nice! Any'ow, that's wot I think! I often say to 'er, if she was to try a bit more—only it ain't fair to say that. She ain't got the time! Stands to reason she ain't. We've 'ad seven children. Two of 'em dead, thank God! I don't mean to say I'm glad they're gone, only—well, you know yourself, they got the best of it, ain't they, now? An' it makes things a bit easier for 'er. It's a bit of a nandful, seven! An' the cookin' an' the cleanin' an' all that. You know, I don't wonder she don't take no pride in 'erself. I don't reely! I dessay she thinks I'm as bad as 'er. She 'ad nice 'ands, too. I mean to say she was very partic'lar about 'er 'ands. Rub lemons on 'em every night to make 'em white. An' glycerine! Ever 'eard of that? Keeps 'em soft an' white. She read about it in a paper. An' do the grate with gloves on. I often say to 'er if she'd only kep' it up, she'd be as nice-lookin' as any of 'em. But she didn't! An' I don't wonder at it neither. Not with wot she 'as to do. Only! . . . They do it all right. I mean to say their 'air don't get the way 'ers is! Mind, I'm not sayin' a word against 'er. She an' me's all right, you know.

I don't mean to say we don't 'ave no words now an' again, but on the 'ole, we're all right. On the 'ole! Proper pals we are. I tell 'er all about this every Sunday. She thinks same as me about it. She's got too much to do. It ain't 'er fault, of course. I mean to say, she ain't to blame. An' it ain't my fault. Jus' can't be 'elped!"

The drift of fashionable folk had thinned, and the little man murmured something about having to go. He gazed about him in the manner of one who is eager to take a last good look at treasured scenes, and then rose and stretched himself.

"I wouldn't miss comin' 'ere for anythink," he said, and added, "Good-day, sir!" and went his way.

THE BURIAL

THE funeral procession from the girl's home to the graveyard was due to begin at half-past two, but long before that hour the crowd of mourners began to collect. They stood about the entrance to the lane leading to the churchyard, and waited. The home of the dead girl faced the lane, and the procession, therefore, would reach its journey's end in a few moments from the time when it began to move. Townsmen and neighbours mingled with men from the country and the hills, and fishermen from the bay where the girl was drowned; and each man as he came up to a group of his acquaintances spoke of the terribleness of the disaster, and then the talk circled round the affairs of the small town.

John Mawhinney came along the old road to Ballyshannon, and when he was by the lane he hailed James O'Hara.

"How're ye, James?" he said.

James O'Hara, a lean, foxy-looking man, turned at the sound of Mawhinney's voice. "Och, I'm just middlin'," he replied, "I've the quare cowl on me! How is yourself?"

"Ah, I'm not so bad. Man-a-dear, this is a tarr'ble sad thing about this young girl!"

"Aye, it is that. Man, I mind her when she was

that height, the same wee girl!" He allowed his hand to fall to the level of his knees as he spoke. "An' a smart wee girl she was, too! Aye! She always had an answer for ye, whatever ye said, she was that sharp!"

He looked up as he spoke, and saw John McClurg approaching. "Is that you, John?" he said.

McClurg, a large, moon-faced man, with little, smiling eyes, came puffing up to them.

"It is surely," he replied to O'Hara's greeting.

"I saw ye in the market the fair day," said Mawhinney, "but ye wurn't lukkin', an' ye didden see me. Did ye do well wi' yer cattle?"

"Ah, I didden do so bad. I might 'a' done better, an' I might 'a' done worse!"

"Did ye sell thon wee heifer ye had wi' ye?"

"I did not. I wudden take the price——"

O'Hara tapped him on the arm. "I s'pose ye come to the funer'l?" he said.

John McClurg glanced across the road to the door of the house where the dead girl lay. "Well," he said, "I thought I wud just dander into the town an' show me respect til the dead, God rest her sowl!" The three men raised their hats at his prayer. "What time does it begin?" he asked.

"They wur talkin' about half-after-two," replied Mawhinney, "but I'm thinkin' it'll be later'n that. Sure, the mail train's not in thrum Bilfast yet, an' there's fren's comin' thrum there an' thrum Derry, too, an' they'll be wantin' their denner when they git here. It'll be three o'clock afore iver they stir out o' the dure!"

"Aye, it will that," said James O'Hara, and then he turned and spoke to John McClurg. "Wur ye wantin' much for yer wee heifer?" he asked.

McClurg bit a piece of tobacco off a long twist of dark villainous stuff, and when he had chewed it in his mouth a while, he spat yellow juice over the kerb, and then said: "You might think I was wantin' too much, an' I might think meself I was wantin' too little!"

"I saw her meself," exclaimed Mawhinney, "afore she went intil the sea, laughin' an' jokin' like annythin'! Aw, God save us all thrum a death the like o' her death!"

"They wur a quare long time findin' her!"

"They wur."

"Wud ye be wantin' five poun's fur yer wee heifer, John McClurg?" said James O'Hara.

"I wud, indeed, an' a bit more on top of it!"

"They foun' her jus' where she went down," continued Mawhinney, in the voice of a man who is reciting an oft-told tale. "Man, it's quare the way the body returns like that!"

"Aye!"

"Who's thon man wi' the tall hat an' the long coat on him, d'ye know?" asked one that stood by of Mawhinney, as a man in a frock-coat knocked at the door.

"I nivir seen him afore," replied Mawhinney. "He's a stranger in this town, I'm thinkin'. D'ye know him, James?"

"I do not," replied O'Hara. "Mebbe he's come be

the train. The mail's in now. Thonder's Patrick Magrath with the mail-car comin' roun' the corner!"

"Ye're mebbe right!" Mawhinney resumed the recital of his tale. "Did ye see the piece in the Derry paper about her?" he said. "Thon was the quare bit. An' there was a piece of portry be the young wumman in the post-affice!"

"Aye, I saw that. It was quare an' nice. I didden know thon wumman cud do the like o' that!"

"Ah, sure she's in Government sarvice, issen she? . . ."

"The paper said she was the quare, clivir, wee girl, an' tuk a lotta prizes at the school in Derry her da sent her to. They must 'a' spent a power o' money on her trainin'!"

"They did that. They nivir grudged her nathin'. It's a quare pity of them!"

"Aye, it only shows ye shudden make a god of yer childher! . . ."

Two young men, one of whom carried a costly wreath in his hands, went up to the door, and presently were admitted to the house.

"Fur dear sake, luk at thon wreath!" exclaimed John Mawhinney. "Mon, thon must 'a' cost somethin'!"

"Aye, it's thrum the young men at the Y.M.C.A. She was goin' to be married to one o' them. Did ye nivir hear about it?"

"Naw. What wus his name?"

"I think it wus young McCracken!"

"What! Thon lad?"

"Aye. It'll be a cut-up for him, this! . . . John McClurg, will ye take six poun' ten for yer heifer?"

"Mebbe I wud if it was affered to me! . . ."

"There's manny a Cathlik would be willin' to give a wreath, too, I'm thinkin'!" said John Mawhinney.

"Aye, that's true enough. Sure, there's no room for bigitry where death is! . . . Wur ye thinkin' o' makin' me the affer, James?"

O'Hara walked a little way from the group, and then, squirting tobacco juice before him, returned to it. "Ah, I was just wondherin' if ye wud take it if it was affered t' ye. I wudden affer more'n five poun' for it meself! . . ."

"Ah, well, it wudden be no good you afferin' that amount. I wudden part wi' it fur the money!"

"There's a brave crowd here now," said O'Hara, turning towards the crowd. "It'll be a big procession, I'm thinkin'!"

"It will that. But I've seen bigger. There was the time Dr. Cochrane died. D'ye mind that? That was a procession an' a half!"

"Aye, it was indeed. Near a mile long that was! . . ."

The door of the house opened, and a number of persons entered.

"They'll be startin' soon," said Mawhinney.

"Ah, well, God help her, she'll soon be oura all this. It's the long sleep til the Day o' Judgment!"

"Ye're right there. Yè are indeed! . . ."

The door slowly reopened, and men came forth bearing the yellow coffin on their shoulders. A great quietness descended upon the village street, and each

man in it removed his hat and, if he were a Catholic, crossed himself and prayed for the repose of the dead girl's soul. Here and there a woman wrapped her shawl about her face and wept. The bearers carried the coffin across the street to the lane leading to the churchyard, and the people in the street fell in behind, and marched slowly towards the grave. A bell tolled softly, and in the house from which the body had just been borne a woman was heard crying and lamenting.

"I'll give ye six poun's fur yer wee heifer," said James O'Hara, as the body went by.

"Ah, God rest her sowl!" murmured McClurg, marking himself with the sign of the cross on the head and breast. "I cudden take less nor six poun' ten!"

"I cudden give more nor six poun'! . . ."

"Well, ye'll not get it fur the price. It's six poun' ten or nathin'!"

"Ye're the hard man to bargain wi'! . . ."

"I'm not hard at all! . . . Mebbe, they're better dead young nor dead oul'!"

"Will ye not budge yer price?"

"I will not!"

"They're in the graveyard now. . . . Come on down til Maloney's public-house, an' I'll sale the bargain wi' ye."

EIGHT O'CLOCK

A Woman A Girl
A Child

It is the dark part of a morning in February: in a little while the sun will break through the blackness and a grey light will creep through the window of the living-room in a small house in South London, where a Woman, *aged beyond her years, which are thirty-three, is kneeling at a chair. Her hands are clenched together, and her eyes are fixed intently on the sky. Her lips move slowly and regularly, and sometimes she cries out, "Oh, God! Oh, God! Oh, God!" There is no other sound in the room, save the ticking of a clock. There is silence, and* The Woman, *beating her hands together, cries out again, "Oh, God! Oh, God! Oh, God!" The door opens, and a* Girl, *whose age is twenty-two, enters, feeling her way in the dark.*

The Girl. Are you there, Jenny?

The Woman. Oh, God! Oh, God!

The Girl. Jenny!

The Woman. Oh, God!

[The Girl *reaches* The Woman *and kneels down beside her.*

THE GIRL. Don't, Jenny!

THE WOMAN. Oh!

THE GIRL. It's me! Lizzie! Your sister, Jenny! I'm with you, dear. Don't take on so! It's—it's all for the best!

[THE GIRL'S *voice breaks, and she sobs.*

THE WOMAN. They'll do it! I know they will! There's no mercy!

THE GIRL. It's hard on you!

THE WOMAN. They don't think of me! [*They are silent for a few moments.*] What's the time?

[THE GIRL *gets up from her knees and feels her way towards the fireplace.*

THE GIRL. It's too dark—I can't see the clock.

THE WOMAN. Strike a match and see.

[THE GIRL *strikes a match and looks at the clock.*

THE GIRL. It's just after seven o'clock.

THE WOMAN [*burying her face in her hands*]. Oh, God! Oh, God!

THE GIRL. Sometimes they're saved at the last minute.

[THE WOMAN *does not reply. She sways before the chair and moans piteously. Neither speaks.* THE GIRL *stands in the centre of the room indeterminately; then she breaks out passionately.*

THE GIRL. Oh, they won't do it! It 'ud be wicked of them to do it! He never meant any harm. It was the drink.

THE WOMAN. There never was a better man when he was sober—wouldn't hurt any one!

THE GIRL. They ought to make allowances! He was sorry after he done it.

THE WOMAN. They never make allowances!

THE GIRL. The people signed a petition for him. *His* wife signed it, too! If she could forgive, why can't they?

THE WOMAN. They never forgive.

THE GIRL. They can't take no notice of the petition. The clergyman signed it. And the Mayor . . .

THE WOMAN. They'll do it—oh, they'll do it!

THE GIRL. It was in anger he done it; and they're not angry. He didn't know what he was doing; and they do. Oh, it's wicked, it's wicked! It ought not to be allowed!

THE WOMAN. Oh! Oh! Oh!

THE GIRL. Why doesn't some one tell them?

THE WOMAN. They wouldn't listen. [*She holds up her hand towards the darkness.*] Oh, God, make them listen! Stop them, oh, God! Soften their hearts!

[*A* CHILD'S *voice is heard outside the room.*

THE CHILD. Mother!

THE WOMAN. They have no hearts to soften!

THE CHILD. Mother!

THE GIRL. There's Maggie calling you.

[THE WOMAN *cries convulsively.*

THE CHILD. Mother!

THE GIRL. What is it, dear?

[*She opens the door, and* THE CHILD, *in her night-dress, is seen standing in the doorway.*

THE CHILD. Is Daddy hanged yet, Aunt Lizzie?

[THE GIRL gathers THE CHILD *up in her arms and stops her mouth with hysterical kisses.*

THE CHILD. You said he'd be hanged to-day, Aunt Lizzie. Is it time yet?

THE WOMAN. Oh, God! Oh, God! Oh, God!

THE GIRL. Don't, dearie, don't say that!

THE CHILD. It's so dark! Will it hurt him, Aunt Lizzie?

THE GIRL. Don't, don't!

[THE CHILD *climbs out of* THE GIRL'S *arms and goes to her mother.*

THE CHILD. Is he hanged yet, mother?

THE WOMAN. No, dear.

THE CHILD. Aren't they going to, mother? You said they would hang him in the morning, and it's the morning now. It is the morning, isn't it?

THE WOMAN. Oh!

THE GIRL. Mebbe they'll let him off, dear.

THE CHILD. No, they won't. I heard a man say Daddy'd be finished to-day! He said I'd be an orphan to-morrow, and it's to-morrow now! Isn't it?

THE GIRL. Yes, dear.

[*It has become lighter and* THE WOMAN *and* THE GIRL *and* THE CHILD *are more distinctly seen.*

THE CHILD. He did that, and a boy laughed.

[*She makes the motion of a rope being tied round the throat, and puts out her tongue in the manner of the strangled.*

THE GIRL. You shouldn't listen to them.

THE CHILD. Will it be long before he's hanged?

THE GIRL. Don't talk like that, dearie!

THE CHILD. Will it be long?

THE GIRL. Not long, dear.

THE CHILD. What time will they hang him?

THE WOMAN. Oh! Oh! Oh!

THE GIRL. Don't, dear! Your poor mother! Go to bed like a good girl!

THE CHILD. I want to stay till Daddy is . . .

THE GIRL. Oh, don't, don't, don't!

THE CHILD [*whimpering*]. I don't want to go to bed.

THE WOMAN. Give her to me.

[THE GIRL *takes* THE CHILD *in her arms and carries her to* THE WOMAN. THE CHILD kneels *beside her mother, who puts her arm round her and buries her face in her hair.*

THE CHILD. It's getting light, mother!

THE WOMAN. What's the time?

THE GIRL. It's a quarter to eight. [*Her voice is dry and hard.*]

THE WOMAN. A quarter to! Oh! Oh! Oh!

[THE WOMAN *sobs.* THE CHILD *fondles her, but, obtaining no response, whimpers vaguely.* THE GIRL *stands passively by the fireplace. There is silence for a little while.*

THE GIRL. They'll be ready now.

THE WOMAN. What's that?

THE GIRL. They'll be making preparations. . . .

THE WOMAN. Oh!

THE GIRL. I saw a picture of it once. . . . They strap their arms and legs. . . .

THE CHILD. Will it hurt him, Aunt Lizzie?

THE GIRL. I wonder what he feels like!

THE CHILD. Aunt Lizzie, will it hurt him?

THE GIRL. They'll be standing round him—gaping at him! [*She runs frantically to the window and beats her hands against the glass.*] Oh, God! God! stop it, stop it! He's only one, and they've got him tied! Give him a chance! . . .

THE WOMAN. He'll be dead soon. Oh, my man, my man!

THE CHILD. I want my father!

THE WOMAN [*clutching* THE CHILD *to her hysterically*]. You'll never see him again. It's us as has to bear it. They never think of us!

THE GIRL. It's nearly eight o'clock.

THE WOMAN. Pray for your father, dear!

THE CHILD. Yes, mother.

[THE CHILD *covers her face with her hands.*

THE GIRL. To be living now, and dead in a minute! [*Passionately.*] It's not right, it's not right! It's killing! Murder! murder!

THE WOMAN. It's the law!

THE CHILD. What'll I say, mother?

THE WOMAN. Just close your eyes, dear, and pray.

[*There is quiet in the room.* THE WOMAN *and* THE CHILD *kneel beside each other,* THE CHILD *with her face covered with her hands,* THE WOMAN *with her face buried in the chair.* THE GIRL *stands at the window, her hands strained against the glass. The dull boom of a clock is heard striking the hour of eight. At the first stroke* THE WOMAN *jumps to her feet and runs shrieking to the window.*

THE WOMAN. No, no, no, don't do it! He's a good man, he wouldn't . . . Oh! [*She falls weeping to the ground.*]

[*The clock continues to boom out the hour of eight. But for this and the choked sobs of* THE WOMAN, *there is silence. Presently both cease. There is quiet.*

THE CHILD [*uncovering her face*]. Is he hanged yet, Aunt Lizzie?

[*It becomes light.*

SAFETY

THERE were many terrors hidden in the heart of Mr. Timms, but they all came from one dreadful thought. Supposing that one day he should be unable to work, what would become of him? If he were to fall ill, or meet with an accident, or if his employers were suddenly to become bankrupt, what would become of him? He would awake at night crying out in fear because of some horrible dream in which he saw himself dismissed from the service of Messrs. Carlingford and Company for one reason or another. Sometimes it was because his accounts had become muddled; and when he dreamt that dream, he rose early and hurried to the office in a sort of delirium and carefully examined his ledgers to make certain that they were in order, that the last figure had been entered, the last total calculated. At other times he dreamt that old age had come upon him, and that his employers had, with regret, informed him that they required the services of a younger and more vigorous man. In this dream, they would say to him that he had been a loyal servant of the firm, and that they were very reluctant to part with him, but that competition was keen and that success came only to the sharp-witted. They always regretted that the state of their finances did not permit them to pension him, but they begged to be allowed to present him with an honorarium of twenty pounds as a

slight token of their regard for him. He could rest assured that he had their good wishes for his future happiness!

From such dreams Mr. Timms would awake in a sweat. He would spring out of bed and run swiftly to the mirror to see whether grey hairs had grown up like tares among wheat to destroy him. The thought of sickness appalled him almost as much as the thought of old age. If he were to meet with an accident or to fall ill, Messrs. Carlingford and Company would probably continue to pay his salary for six months. They had been known to do that to a man who was ill. But supposing Mr. Timms were to be ill for more than six months? . . . The firm could not be expected to continue paying a salary to a man who was of no use to them. Then his savings would begin to shrink. And when they had gone! . . . He always gave a gulp when that thought came into his mind. But what he feared most of all was that some day he might give way to his moods. At intervals he had an extraordinary desire to seek for adventures. Generally those desires came at the end of each quarter when his work was most heavy. He would be sitting quietly at his desk at nine or ten o'clock in the evening—there was always a lot of overtime work at the end of the quarter—and suddenly, just as he was ruling a line in the ledger or writing "E. and O. E." at the foot of an account, he would feel something inside him, urging him to do the most preposterous things. The something would say, "Why don't you go out and enjoy yourself! Go to a theatre or a music-hall or a concert or a public-

house! Do something to show that you are alive! . . ." All of which was extremely silly, for supposing he were to take the advice of the something inside him, supposing he were to go to a public-house and were to get drunk—well, that would be awful! Mr. Carlingford, who was very particular about temperance, might happen to pass by the public-house just at the moment that he was reeling out of it, and might think that he was in the habit of getting drunk. Even if he were to escape from the eye of Mr. Carlingford and were not to get into trouble with the police, he would be certain to awake in the morning with a headache. He might be tempted to stay in bed longer than usual, and then he would be late for the office, and for the first time in his life he would find a red line drawn against his name in the attendance book. Even if he were not late for the office, his work would be done less accurately and expeditiously because of his headache, and Mr. Carlingford would notice it. Mr. Carlingford would be sure to notice a thing like that, much more likely to notice it in him than in Morrison, who often came to the office late and made quite a number of mistakes. The penalty of being very careful was that any carelessness was particularly noticeable. Mr. Carlingford would say, "Hilloa, Timms! What's this? A mistake! By *you*! If it had been Morrison, of course, but *you*! Aren't you up to the mark this morning?" And perhaps he would say to the junior partner, "Timms is getting old . . . not quite up to the mark. Found him making a silly mistake this morning! . . ." Awful!

And the result of doing anything so silly as was

suggested to him by the thing inside him would probably be dismissal. The sack! . . . Mr. Timms pointed all this out to the thing inside him so clearly that he felt sure it must be convinced that it was useless and stupid to keep on suggesting things to him, but all the same he was afraid of it. Some day it might be too strong for him. He remembered with alarm that on one occasion, when he was quite a young man, it had startled him out of his wits by suggesting to him that he should marry a very nice young person who had been employed by Carlingford and Company as a typist. It had carried him so far off his balance that he had actually spoken to her during office hours about matters that were not strictly relevant to business. He shuddered when he remembered how the entire firm of Carlingford and Company had unexpectedly come into the office one afternoon and found him standing by Miss Gordon's side. Fortunately, he had had presence of mind to snatch up a batch of bills and pretend to be explaining them to her. But it was a near thing. He had received such a shock that he had never again ventured to speak to her about anything but strict business during office hours. Once, he had taken her to tea, and they had talked together for quite a long time about the office. Miss Gordon had shown an intelligent interest in business and was always willing to stay late when there was a rush of work. And she dressed quietly, in a nice, refined way—always looked neat and inconspicuous. One typist they had had was quite loud in her dress, and rude, too, when the firm spoke to her about it . . . said she liked bright colours, and if the

firm were not satisfied with her clothes, would they please take a week's notice! . . . Such a way to go on in the City! Mr. Timms had seen her, with his own eyes he had seen her, using a powder-puff! In the office! But Miss Gordon was not like that: a nice, quiet woman, very neat and respectful and not at all moody as so many young women were. She had asked him to her home, and she and her mother, a widow, had spent the whole of that Sunday afternoon discussing the office with him. It was quite late by the time they had finished saying all they had to say about it, and Mrs. Gordon urged him to stay to supper. And he did. Then, one Saturday, he asked Miss Gordon if she would care to go to a theatre with him, and she had said she would. They went to see a piece called "Iolanthe," chosen by her, which Mr. Timms thought rather silly, but Miss Gordon liked it. She said that the actress who played the principal part was awfully nice, and that the play itself was awfully nice, once you got used to the idea of fairies mixing up with people. She said that she was awfully fond of Gilbert and Sullivan, two gentlemen who, so Mr. Timms discovered, were responsible for the play. It appeared that they had written many plays of a similar character. Miss Gordon had seen several of them, and she thought they were all awfully nice. Her mother thought so, too, although she preferred what she called a *good* play! . . .

Mr. Timms had taken Miss Gordon to tea after that matinee at the Savoy. They went into a tea-shop in the Strand, but they did not talk very much, for Mr.

Timms was paralyzed with the thought that the tea would cost more than he had meant to spend on it. The tea-shop had an expensive look, but the tea cost less than he had imagined it would. Nevertheless, the shock upset him. Not that he was mean . . . no, but one simply had to think of the future. The thought of that tea-shop had prevented him from yielding to a wild impulse which had filled him during the performance of "Iolanthe": an impulse to ask Miss Gordon to *dine* with him at some modest restaurant and go to another theatre afterwards. Instead, he said good-bye to her at Charing Cross railway station. She thanked him very much for the awfully nice afternoon they had had together! . . .

He remembered all that so well. He had gone home, feeling that a life passed continually in the society of Miss Gordon would be very pleasant. Nice and quiet and inconspicuous. He remembered distinctly the sensation of loneliness that he had had as he ascended the stairs of the lodging-house in Camberwell, where he lived. How dingy his bed-sitting-room had seemed to him, after the romantic splendours of "Iolanthe," how tasteless and sloppy had seemed the meal made by Miss Squibb, his landlady, after the prettiness of the tea-shop. The thing inside him kept on saying, "Risk it, man, risk it!" until, to his amazement, he found himself out in the street and on his way to Miss Gordon's home. His hand was actually at the bell-push, about to press it, when reason and sanity returned to him, and his wiser self said, "But supposing you lose your job, or fall sick or something, what would become of

you, with a wife and perhaps children?" His hand had fallen away from the bell-push, and he had turned and fled back to Miss Squibb's lodging-house! . . .

Miss Gordon left the firm of Carlingford and Company soon after that, and he never saw her again. He could recall the look of bewilderment with which she had regarded him for several days, and how difficult it had been not to say, "Don't look at me like that!" He had taken her hand, on the last day of her employment by the firm, and had bidden her "Good-bye" and wished her luck in her new job. He remembered that she had looked up at him for a moment or two, with a queer, questioning expression in her eyes, and that she had stood still for a while as if she were waiting for him to say something. And then she had gone away. Her hand had trembled, and he had a frightened feeling that she was going to cry. The firm would not have liked it if she had cried! . . . He supposed she had married. Perhaps she was dead!

That was the kind of thing that the enemy inside him was always urging him to do. Morrison had married, and Morrison was poor. Of course, Mr. Timms was also poor, but not so poor as Morrison, who was always harassed about something. His wife was ill or one of the children was ill, or something was wrong or about to go wrong. Then one of the children died! . . . Of course, he was very sorry for Morrison when that happened, but he could not help thinking that it was lucky for him that he ran no risk of suffering such misfortunes. Morrison really ought to have thought more of the future, instead of marrying young

and having so many children. When Mr. Timms reflected on the approach of old age and disaster, he was comforted by the thought that such things would be worse for Morrison than they were likely to be for him. One day, a junior clerk in the office, quite a nice chap called Cook . . . a bit wild, perhaps, and dreamy . . . suddenly threw his pen down on the ledger and swore horribly. He made a terrible blot in the middle of a clean page, too. "I'm fed up with this life," he said, and swinging himself off the high stool, he went to the coat-peg and took down his hat and coat.

"But it's not lunch-time," said Mr. Timms to him wonderingly.

"I know that," Cook answered, "and I don't care if it never is. I'm off. I'm going to Canada or hell or somewhere out of this. I'm sick of clerking!"

Mr. Timms had begged him to think about the future or at all events not to do anything rash. "Think it over," he begged, but young Cook was so headstrong. Mr. Timms had asked him what prospects of employment he had in Canada, and, to his horror, was told he had none. Cook had no friends in Canada, no definite or indefinite promise of work, no prospects, no anything.

"But it's madness," said Mr. Timms, "to throw up a safe job—well, fairly safe job—for a risky thing like Canada!"

"You've got to take risks sometimes," said Cook obstinately.

"Wait till you're older, and then you'll know better," Mr. Timms answered.

And then young Cook had said a very strange thing. "Yes, I know," he said gloomily. "All you old chaps! . . ." *Old* chaps! That hurt Mr. Timms. "All you old chaps say that, and when you're old you're too cowardly to know better!"

While Mr. Timms was busy trying to understand the meaning of this odd assertion young Cook went away, and it was not until Mr. Carlingford called for him that the firm realized what had happened.

"Where's Cook?" Mr. Carlingford angrily demanded, for he had been kept waiting a long time—a minute or two.

"I think he's gone to Canada, sir!" said Mr. Timms.

"Gone to where?"

Mr. Timms explained what had happened.

"Are his books all right?" Mr. Carlingford asked, and when he was assured that young Cook had not embezzled any of the firm's money, he nodded his head and said, "Silly young fool! Leaving a good, safe job! . . ."

"Yes, sir!" said Mr. Timms. "That's what I said to him."

Cook had written to Mr. Timms some months afterwards, and had stated that he was getting on well. "It was rotten at first, and I nearly chucked in my hand, but *this* is worth it. Why don't you come out here?"

Mr. Timms replied to Cook at once, answering all his questions with precision. He concluded by saying that it would be very absurd at his age to give up a comparatively safe job for a positively uncertain pros-

pect in a strange country. It had happened that young Cook had succeeded, but that did not mean that Mr. Timms would also succeed. As Cook himself admitted, the struggle at first had been very severe, and Mr. Timms was much older than Cook! . . . Then the dreadful thing happened. The firm of Carlingford and Company became bankrupt, and Mr. Timms was out of work. Mr. Carlingford had been leading a wild and extravagant life. There were tales of gambling, and wicked women out of wicked plays. Mr. Timms could have struck Mr. Carlingford when he heard how the firm had been ruined. What right had the coarse bully to play fast and loose with Mr. Timms's livelihood. Damn and blast him! . . . But it was no good cursing Mr. Carlingford, especially as he had shot himself soon after his examination by the Registrar. What Mr. Timms now had to do was to find other work and find it quickly. Thank God, he had not yielded to the impulse to marry Miss Gordon! . . . In a state of desperation, he tramped from office to office, from agency to agency, in search of employment, but always he was told that a younger man was required or that he was just too late. He would go home in the evenings, faint with fatigue and the lack of adequate meals, and calculate the amount of his savings. He left Miss Squibbs' house and took a cheaper lodging nearer to the City so that his travelling fares were less. He estimated the number of weeks he could live on a pound a week without work, and found that he had saved enough money to keep him in penurious idleness for a year and a half. Eighteen months! After

that? . . . He became frenzied when six months had gone by and he was still unemployed. He tried to live on less than a pound a week, and moved to a still cheaper lodging. His hopes were raised by a temporary job which, he was told, might become a permanent one, but were dashed again at the end of a month. He got a little ill-paid work, addressing circulars, which he did until one evening he felt a curious pain which sent him in a panic to a doctor.

"If I don't take care of myself," he said, "I shan't be able to work at all, and then what will become of me?"

He went into the doctor's surgery, and sat down in the waiting-room to wait for his turn to be examined. He fingered the pages of an old illustrated magazine that was lying on the table, and found himself getting confused over a picture of stalactites and stalagmites that had been discovered in a fearful cave in Africa. "Queer, uncomfortable things!" he was muttering to himself, when he was summoned to the surgery. . . . He came out of the surgery with a smile on his face. The lines about his mouth and eyes seemed to have been rolled away. His nervousness and alarm were gone, and in their place was a deep calm. He glanced about him fearlessly, and when he said "Good-bye" to the doctor he did so almost jauntily.

"Plucky chap, that!" thought the doctor as he closed the door behind him.

"Thank God," said Mr. Timms, "O, thank God, I'm safe at last!"

And in three months he was dead.

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